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THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

(The Song Celestial)

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THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

(The Song Celestial)

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S. L. N. SIMHA

BIRLA ACADEMY OF ART AND CULTURE
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PREFACE

AN explanation is due from the author, who goes by the label of economist, as to why he ventured to write this little book; is it not a case of fools rushing in where angels fear to tread?! In the last week of February 1979, when Shri Basant Kumar Birla called at the author's place in the course of a very brief visit to Madras, he found the author reading Sri Aurobindo's *Gita*. Thereupon, Basant Kumarji suggested to the author that he produce a little book on the *Gita*, mainly, for the use of foreigners but one which Indians should also like. The author first expressed reservations about his ability to write such a book, but Basant Kumarji would not take a NO. Taking this request from Shri Birla as a divine mandate, the author started working on the assignment, shortly thereafter, utilising the maximum of his spare time left after his heavy schedule of official work. The assignment has been completed, within the time of about a year mentioned by Basant Kumarji.

This is not an original work nor is this a display of scholarship. It is an earnest and humble effort to understand the significance of the *Gita* from the layman's point of view and share with fellow-laymen the author's understanding of this great work. The merits, if any, and the numerous defects and deficiencies, which learned men will no doubt find in this book, all belong to HIM! Readers are requested to treat as complementary the main text and the portion giving a summary of each of the eighteen chapters.

The author's grateful thanks are due to two friends, Shri V. K. Narasimhan and Shri S. Sankaranarayanan, who went through the manuscript with loving care, considered it worthy of publication and suggested some editorial changes. The author was also much relieved when another friend, an eminent Professor of Philosophy, while expressing inability to accede to the author's request that he go through the manuscript, since he was busy writing a book, had the following to say: "I am sure your findings will be of immense value, *free as you are from Sanskritic and Philosophical inhibitions*"!

In conclusion, the author wishes to convey his sincere thanks to Basant Kumarji for the opportunity he created for the author to study intensely this glorious scripture of India. It is also nice of him to get this published by the Birla Academy of Art and Culture. In the preparation of the manuscript, Nagalakshmi Parthasarathy has rendered devoted secretarial service. Proof-reading was in the able hands of Indira Raman and S. Ratnakar. The Jupiter Press has done a very good job of printing and binding.

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Chapter *ONE*

Introduction

THE *Bhagavadgita,* the 'Lord's Song' or 'Song Celestial', is an outstanding example of a national philosophical and religious treatise which has universal appeal. Its theme is at once sublime and practical and its message is direct and simple. It has appeal to the elite and the masses alike.

The *Gita,* as it is generally referred to for brevity, is one of the three outstanding Hindu philosophical/ religious treatises, the other two being the *Upanisads* and the *Brahma-Sutras*. In these three works, there is a great deal of diversity in the exposition of the basic tenets of the Hindu philosophy of *Vedanta,* also called the *Sanathana Dharma,* or the eternal doctrine, but there is also much that is common among them, so that, leaving aside a lot of controversy, one sees in them a core of philosophy that could be regarded as being of general acceptance. The *Upanisads* lay stress on the mystical aspect of *Vedanta* and *Brahma-Sutras* emphasise the metaphysical side. The *Gita*'s focus is on moral and spiritual purification. Undoubtedly, the *Bhagavadgita* is the most widely studied treatise among the Indian people, scholars and laymen alike. It has permeated into the daily life of the masses

almost to the extent that the great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, have done.

The *Bhagavadgita* is a three-in-one treatise, comprising philosophy, ethics and religion, all woven into a handsome and sturdy fabric. The central theme of the *Gita* is human conduct. It provides a framework, which should enable man to be 'happy' and be at peace with himself, the environment and the Creator. The path, when once it is identified and traversed upon, is solid, smooth and short.

This great *Vedantic* work, while distinctly Indian, is compatible with a wide variety of economic, social and religious doctrines that have emerged all over the world, over the centuries, based partly on intuition and partly on experience. This is not to suggest that the *Gita* is a loose mixture, lacking in coherence and direction. On the contrary, it is a clear-cut, positive and a remarkably unified treatise, though it lends itself to different interpretations on matters like the relationship between the individual soul and the universal soul. Above all, its tenets are wholly consistent with rationalism and common sense. The *Gita* is an excellent blend of idealism and realism, and of religion, philosophy and ethics.

A special reason for the *Gita*'s occupying an exalted place among the religious and philosophical works of India is that it is stated to have been expounded by the Lord Himself, in His incarnation as Krishna. The *Gita* is in the form of a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, a Warrior Prince.

It should also be mentioned that the Krishna-Arjuna dialogue took place, according to tradition, on the battlefield, when the armies of the *Pandavas*, of whom Arjuna was the middle one among five brothers, with Dharmaraya as the eldest, and the *Kauravas*, their cousins, numbering a

hundred and headed by Duryodhana, were arrayed against each other. It may be helpful to give a little background of the epic of *Mahabharata,* of which the *Gita* is believed to be a part.

Briefly, the *Pandavas* represent the forces of righteousness while the *Kauravas* portray the forces of evil. The *Kauravas* grabbed the kingdom, which legitimately belonged to both the sets of brothers, humiliated the *Pandavas* in a variety of ways and tried their utmost to exterminate them. The *Pandavas* showed much patience and were prepared to accept, in a spirit of self-denial and compromise, even a small portion of the kingdom that was their due. Several persons, including Lord Krishna Himself, tried to mediate, to secure for the *Pandavas* even a token share in the kingdom, but this was fruitless.

Finally, the *Pandavas* were forced to take up arms, not only for preserving their honour as *Kshatriyas* (the warrior class), but also as a matter of duty of destroying the forces of evil.

Among the *Pandavas,* much was expected of Arjuna, a warrior of outstanding prowess, and also of Bhima, the second brother. The importance of the *Mahabharata* War between the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas* can be gauged by the fact that the Lord Krishna Himself volunteered to be Arjuna's 'Charioteer', an example of the Lord's intense interest in destroying the forces of evil. This is the setting for the exposition of the *Gita.*

On the eve of the commencement of the battle, Arjuna gets into a mood of despondency and has serious doubts regarding the wisdom of waging a war against his kith and kin. He visualises all the horrors of war and its aftermath and declares to his 'Charioteer' that he

will not fight, and so saying he lays down his bow and arrows.

Then begins a long discourse by the Lord on the misplaced sadness on the part of Arjuna, the inappropriateness, as a warrior, of his wish not to fight and the duty cast on him to combat the forces of evil with all his strength, disregarding the attendant dangers and being unmindful of the consequences. Arjuna must have faith in his cause and go about the job in a spirit of dedication and detachment, placing the utmost trust in the Almighty. It was not a sin to destroy his evil-minded relatives; on the contrary, it would be sinful on the part of Arjuna not to fight the elements of wickedness.

This long 'dialogue', most of which is uttered by Krishna and interspered with some questions and observations by Arjuna, is the subject matter of the *Gita,* which has been given to us in verse, comprising 700 stanzas, spread over 18 chapters, of varying size. The advantage of a dialogue form of narration is that matters can be re-opened to seek clarifications, objections can be raised and seeming contradictions pointed out to the teacher. This mode of exposition makes for better understanding of the subject-matter, especially when the theme is one where things cannot be proved as in a laboratory. The *Gita* is concerned with spiritual matters of the loftiest type, which are better comprehended through a dialogue.

On the other hand, the conversation procedure means some repetition. But who can say that repetition will not do good to the student in a lasting way? Surely, 700 stanzas are by no means unduly long for a work that is supposed to contain the cream of the voluminous philosophical and spiritual treatises, of Hinduism, especially spread over numerous *Upanisads.*

One should also not attach importance to the comment that it looks odd, if not incredible, that on the battle-field, especially on the eve of a major war, so much time should have been spent on a discussion whether or not Arjuna should proceed with the war. In the first place, the code of conduct in warfare in those days was such as to permit long conferences, prior to or even during a war. Secondly, where the subject was one of extraordinary importance, affecting the lives and welfare of thousands and thousands of persons and raising questions of the most fundamental sort, is it not beneficial that discussions are somewhat long rather than brief?

In any event, what we have is a work attributed to a sage, Vyasa, who is said to have composed the *Gita,* on the basis of the dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna. It is rather likely that Vyasa has elaborated the essential points made by Krishna on the battle-field. In this matter, the exhortation 'suspension of disbelief constitutes poetic faith' holds good.

The *Gita* is in the form of Sanskrit verse. In Sanskrit, *Gita* means 'song' and *Bhagavat* means 'divine' or 'holy'. Thus *Bhagavadgita* means Divine or Holy or the Lord's Song. It is also referred to as Krishna's Song. The *Gita*'s language is remarkably simple and lucid. The beauty of this arrangement is that it is easy to memorise and quote as may be appropriate. Any of the 18 chapters and any verse can be picked at random and read with interest, in fact delight.

Let us now turn briefly to the contents of the *Bhagavadgita.* The background to the Lord's discourse was the moral and spiritual conflict in Arjuna regarding his waging a war against his close relatives, even if his cause was just. In Arjuna's mind arose a sense of sin at having

to kill so many of his relatives and teachers, and their forces. Arjuna was also concerned at the harmful social and political consequences of large-scale destruction of the armies on both sides. So, Krishna has to tell Arjuna a lot about one's duty and the imperativeness of performing it under all circumstances, pleasant and unpleasant. This is not to say that 'pleasant' and 'unpleasant' are what they appear to be. The so-called 'pleasant' may be ephemeral and harmful while what looks 'unpleasant' may be beneficial ultimately.

It was also necessary for Krishna to explain to Arjuna what constituted 'death' and 'life', since Arjuna was unwilling to cause death to the *Kauravas* and their armies. This leads to a distinction between body and soul, the former being perishable (in the sense it is mutable) and the latter imperishable and immutable. The association of the soul with a body is the result of the working of *Karma,* or bondage of the soul, caused by attachment to the sense objects.

Non-attachment to the senses could take either of two ways, namely, the path of renunciation of work and the path of disinterested or unselfish performance of work; which is the better path, forms the subject of considerable discussion in the treatise. The qualities that are required for a detached life are then mentioned.

The distinction between body and soul leads naturally to the discussion of the relationship between the individual soul and the 'universal' soul, that is to say God or the 'Brahman' of the Vedantic concept or the 'Supreme' person. It comes out clearly in the work that God is all powerful and that nature and man owe their origin and substance to HIS will. God is both immanent and transcendent, according to the *Gita.* Each soul is endowed with a

certain quality, derived from the three broadly defined categories, namely, *Tamas, Rajas* and *Sattva,* and also a degree of freedom, albeit a limited one, to ' shape ' itself. Endowment and environment have a vital influence on the individual soul in its evolution. Yet, the endeavour of everyone must be to rise above the limitations of endowment and environement and seek ' union ' with God.

Many paths are open to the individual to ' reach ' God, namely, knowledge, work, devotion and surrender. Each has its characteristics, but it will be evident that they are intimately related to one another and one leads to another in such a manner that ultimately they become indistinguishable. Yet, the *Gita* lays the utmost stress on the path of work, not for the benefit of the individual engaging in work, but, for universal good and *as offering to God.*

Regardless of the path chosen initially for God-realisation, everyone is enjoined to cultivate several ' good ' qualities and eschew ' evil ' ones, for efficient living in this world and for salvation in the world beyond. The *Gita* lays stress both on individual effort and divine grace in that all-important objective in life, namely, to know the ultimate, reality or goal and reach it.

The union of the individual soul with God or ' Yoga ' is the central theme of the *Gita.* That is why in the Colophon at the end of every chapter, the author refers to the *Gita* as the " Upanisad of the Bhagavadgita, the science of the eternal or absolute, the scripture of Yoga ...". In other words, apart from the traditional *Upanisads,* the Gita is also an *Upanisad,* probably the *Upanisad* par excellence. It gives the essence of the Vedantic philosophy with clarity and in a convincing manner. The *Gita* is essentially *Brahmavidya,* that is to say the science of the

eternal or absolute. It is also a *Yogasastra*, or a scripture of Yoga, which deals with the practical aspect of union of the individual soul with God.

In other words, it is of the utmost importance to note that the *Gita* is a book of the spiritual life. Of course, it is also a book of practical ethics. It is an excellent management book for our daily life, whether at home or in the field and factory or in the office. It is also a book which preaches a lot of socialism. All this renders the *Gita* a book of remarkable practical utility for the good of the individual and welfare of the community. However, the book is more than all this. The essential aspect of it is that the efficient performance of duty in a spirit of renunciation, the development of noble traits and a feeling of absolute equality must all be done as *Yajna* or offering to God. That is to say, the student of the *Gita* must be one seeking spiritual development. Of course, even if people read the *Gita* for its usefulness as an ethical and management guide, it will have served a good purpose. But, the hope and expectation is that the reader would proceed to the next stage of God-realisation, through the triple device of works, knowledge and love.

The path of the good life is not an easy one. It is like tight rope-walking. One has to operate within the four corners of one's endowment and environment and yet endeavour to overcome the handicaps imposed by one's in-born qualities and external factors. A person's qualities in the present life are a result of his actions in the earlier births, in accordance with the working of the law of *Karma*, or the law of cause and effect. This should not lead to a feeling of helplessness on the part of the individual. He should, on the other hand, strive to better himself in every way, getting the best of his endowments

not for his personal good, but, for that of the community and as offering to God.

The core of the *Gita* teaching is the renunciation, on the part of an individual, of the fruits of his action. ' Duty ' must be performed, with enthusiasm and efficiency, but, without desire for the fruits of the duty or action. The path of works, the path of knowledge and the path of devotion are open to the spiritual aspirant but in the *Gita* there is a clear preference for the path of works. In other words, what should be practised in renunciation of the fruits of work and, equally important, egoism, and not the renunciation of work. Work is a must for every body, including God Himself. That is why, the *Gita* is also often referred to as a treatise on *Karma-yoga*. There is to be sublimation of work into worship.

In brief, the *Gita* endeavours to help the reader to understand himself, nature and God and live in peace and harmony with nature and in the awareness of God's presence, guidance and power, always. The topics covered are thus profound and yet their exposition is simple, lucid and convincing. According to some commentators, the 18 chapters of the *Gita* can be grouped into three sections of six chapters each. The first six chapters explain the nature of the finite self and the process of self-realisation through the paths of *Karma* (works) and *Jnana* (knowledge). The next six chapters deal with the nature of the Supreme Reality or God and its realisation through the path of *Bhakti* (devotion and love). In the last six chapters, the matters dealt with in the first twelve chapters are reconsidered and a synthesis is achieved. They discuss the practical applications of self-realisation and God-realisation to individual and social life in human communities. There is thus, in the *Gita,* not a little repetition, which it would

appear was deliberate, intended to elucidate the most profound matters touching our life. Who can maintain that 700 stanzas are too many, for a thorough discussion of the nature of man and the nature of God and of ways and means of God-realisation?

With this background, the *Gita* can be dealt with in two ways. One is to proceed chapter by chapter. The alternative is to consider the treatise under broad topics. This arrangement helps us to look at the *Gita* as a whole and is better suited for a brief exposition of the sort attempted here, essentially for laymen, Indian and foreign. Actually, something of both has been attempted in that a chapter by chapter *summary* is also given at the end of the book. It is hoped that the two together, that is to say, the general exposition and the chapter by chapter summary, will help the reader to grasp the fundamental tenets of the *Gita*, or at any rate to rouse his interest in this great work.

Chapter *TWO*

Body, Soul, Gunas and Karma

AT the very outset of the dialogue, Lord Krishna is compelled to mention to Arjuna the distinction between body and the soul within, the one seen and the other unseen but very much present. Arjuna, it may be recalled, begins the whole dialogue with an expression of utter sadness at the prospect of having to kill a large number of persons, mostly his kith and kin. He regards the whole business as sinful and casts away his bow and arrows.

Apparently, Arjuna was suffering from feelings of misplaced affection and friendship. The pity of Arjuna had nothing in common with divine compassion. His aversion to violence arose from the fact that his relatives were involved in the conflict. Arjuna was suffering from self-pity. He was also confused with regard to what was right and what was wrong, righteousness and unrighteousness. In that frame of mind of anguish and moral uncertainity, he turned to his divine guide and charioteer, Krishna.

Krishna first tried the expedient of taunting Arjuna for his 'Un-Aryan' and unmanly feeling of dejection and faint-heartedness at the hour of crisis. But Arjuna

reiterated and expatiated on his earlier point of not wanting to kill venerable persons and relatives in the *Kaurava* camp. He went further and said he did not know which was better, whether the *Pandavas* conquering the *Kauravas* or the opposite. Arjuna was overcome by a sense of helplessness and he was confused as to what his duty was. He sought Krishna's guidance, but even while doing this he aired the view, as people often do, that his victory would not drive away his grief.

In this situation, Krishna had to change his strategy and begin on a philosophical note. Krishna first deals with the ephemerality of death and life. He tells Arjuna that the wise do not grieve at death, for what perishes is the body, but there is encased in each body another entity, namely, the soul, also called by various other names such as *jiva, atman* and *purusha,* which is indestructible and eternal. The soul was there before it entered a particular body and the soul will live even after the body is no more, by taking another body. This is likened to a person's casting off worn-out garments and taking new ones. Weapons do not cleave the soul nor does fire burn it. The soul was neither born nor does it die. It is eternal, immaterial and immutable.

The soul is not lodged in any one part of the body. It is everywhere in the body, all-pervading. As the ether is not effected by reason of its subtlety, so is the self or the soul not affected. Krishna also compares the body to a field and the soul to the Lord or the knower of the field. As the one Sun illumines the whole world, the soul illumines the whole body. It is the soul which wills the activities of the body and enables the body to be a living organism.

The association of the soul with the body and its

consequent confining and crippling effect are due to the working of *Karma,* which is ' caused as well as kept up by attachment to the objects of the senses and to the results of work '. In this context, *Karma* is the phenomenon of cause and effect, of the action and impressed tendency generated by action in the previous states of the embodied existence of the soul. Release from the bondage of *Karma* is to be obtained through the practice of non-attachment to the sense objects; then the soul becomes free. Disinterested or unselfish performance of duties, with constant meditation of the Supreme Person, is stated to be the path of enlightenment.

The analogy of the body to the field and the soul to the owner of the field is full of significance. Even as there could be a good harvest if the field is tended properly by the cultivator, or poor or no crop if it is negletced, so is proper cultivation of the body by the soul essential for it to reap the harvest of its release from the body and its union with the ' Supreme ' soul, whatever be the connotation of the word ' union '. The only difference is that unlike the cultivator who has to cling to the field for his prosperity and welfare, the soul must try to secure release from the body!

The body or the field is an aspect of *Prakriti* or nature, comprising the five great elements, namely, earth, water, fire, air and space (ether), the ego (*ahamkara* or the I-ness), the intellect (buddhi) and the unmanifested (*Avyakta*), the ten senses and the one (mind) and the five objects of the senses. The ' unmanifested ' has been explained as ' the root principle of all material existence ' or ' the primordial basis and substratum of the universe ' of matter and energy. The ten senses are the five cognitive organs and the five organs of action. The sense objects are

sound, touch, form, taste and odour. Again, desire, aversion, pleasure, pain, organism (the aggregate), intelligence and steadfastness constitute the body and its transformations. It should be noted that the body is more than a physical/chemical entity; it is psychological too. Its essential nature is that of a vehicle or instrument, the energy or power being supplied by the soul.

The body as matter and soul as spirit are without beginning. It is profitless to trace their origin, like hen and egg mystery or that of tree and seed. The body, that is to say matter, is mortal and mutable (but not annihilated), whereas the soul is immortal and immutable. It is the body that has the *gunas* or qualities or forms of energy (*Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas*) and that undergoes modifications, namely, desire, aversion, pleasure, pain, etc. The body is stated to be responsible for agency in relation to causes and effects, while the soul is said to be responsible for the experience of pleasure and pain.

Further, the soul, seated within the body, enjoys the qualities (modes) born of the body. This attachment to the qualities is the cause of the soul's birth in good and evil wombs. Thus, while the soul, in its essential form, is free from any of the triple qualities, an embodied soul is characterised by these qualities, the price paid by the soul for the company it keeps, as it were! The soul is not merely one of ordinary company. It presides over the body.

The process of embodiment of the soul in one body or the other, again and again, goes on so long as efforts, virtuous or vicious, are made to secure the pleasures and avoid the pains associated with the body, as a result of the past actions. The transmigration of the soul goes on until such time as the soul adopts the right rule of conduct

of utter selflessness and absolute equality. In other words, this calls for the assertion of the soul against the tendencies of the body, which have the effect of prolonging the bondage. The ways of doing this will be discussed later.

The individual soul is a part of the Universal Soul, or God, who dwells in every body, in addition to the soul. In other words, every body has two souls, one Supreme and the other subordinate, like the owner and cultivating tenant of a field. The Supreme soul, while remaining in a body, neither works nor is affected by what the body does, because the Supreme soul is beginningless. God illumines every field, like the one Sun and is like a Supreme Commander of creation. HE supports everything. There are different interpretations with regard to the nature of the relationship between the individual soul and the Supreme soul. This will be considered in a later chapter.

From the foregoing, it will be seen that the three entities, body, soul and Supreme soul, are distinct and yet they are linked to each other intimately, so as to constitute an organic unity. The knowledge of the nature of these entities and their relationships, is possible only with the possession of the qualities of humility, unprentiousness, service of the preceptor, purity, steadfastness, self-control, indifference to the objects of the senses, non-egotism, absence of identification with spouse, children and home, equanimity in regard to desirable and undesirable happenings and unswerving devotion to God, in a quiet environment. It is important to note that knowledge mentioned above is not merely theoretical but includes the practice of the moral virtues. This knowledge, it is well to know, also inculcates the feeling of *Samatva*, or of equality, rather unselfish equality, among all beings, animate or inanimate.

At this stage, let us turn to the *gunas* or qualities, which are said to belong to matter or body, but which also affect the soul by virtue of its association with the body. The *Gita* refers to three qualities — *Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas,* which have been translated roughly to (i) goodness or intelligence, (ii) passion or activity and (iii) dullness or inertia. All these qualities have a binding effect on the body and the soul; even *Sattva* quality has this effect, which means that the cycle of birth and death goes on. So, the endeavour must be to rise above or go beyond the qualities, the state of *tri-gunatita.*

Sattva is illuminating and healthful, on account of its purity. It binds the soul by attachment to happiness and by attachment to knowledge. Apparently, the knowledge referred to here is not knowledge of the divine. It refers to the lower intellectual knowledge. The thing to note is that even the *Sattva* quality means the presence of ego-sense and leads to desires, even though for noble objects. So, there will be hankering after knowledge and happiness, on the part of a *Sattvic* person.

Rajas is of the nature of desire and the source of covetousness and selfish attachment. It binds the soul to action through desires. *Rajas* is really the source of passion. *Tamas* is born of ignorance or wrong understanding and gives rise to wrong understanding. It is said to bind the soul through heedlessness, sloth and sleep.

In every person, all the three qualities are present in varying degrees. In some, *Sattva* is uppermost, suppressing the other two. Likewise, in some, *Rajas* is the dominant quality, overshadowing the other two, and the same is true of *Tamas.* The quality which is dominant at the time of death is declared to determine the re-birth quality of the person. Thus, if *Sattva* is dominant

quality when a person dies, he attains birth among the holy ones, those who know the highest.

Obviously, *Sattva* is the best of the three qualities, but, as already mentioned, to attain the supreme knowledge, one has to go beyond *Sattva* and become qualityless. He must recognise the operation of the three qualities on the body and soul and also perceive that there is 'something', a spiritual entity, beyond these qualities; then he attains likeness to the Supreme Deity or becomes God Himself. The soul is then free from 'birth, death, old age and sorrow'.

In answer to Arjuna's question, Krishna mentions the characteristics of a person who has gone beyond the three qualities as also the means of achieving this state. Such a person is free from the involvement of the qualities. He does not abhor them when they are present nor longs for them when absent. He is indifferent to and unconcerned with the qualities. That is to say, he sees the mutation of nature but is not entangled in it. He regards alike the pairs of opposites, that is to say, pleasure and pain, success and failure, fame and infame, praise and censure, and friends and foes. To such a person, a lump of earth, a stone and gold are all alike. He gives up all initiative for action of a selfish character. The transcendence of the qualities also means unswerving devotion to God, who is the abode of the nectar of immortality, ever-lasting righteousness and unending bliss.

The characteristics of the person that wishes to transcend the three gunas are the same outlined by the Lord, at the very early stage of the dialogue with Arjuna, to describe a *Sthithaprajna,* a person of steady-minded wisdom, without selfishness and with perfect-equanimity concerning the pairs of opposites — success and failure,

joy and sorrow, fame and ill-fame, friendship and enmity, etc., etc. He is free from desires and has eschewed greed, lust, anger, arrogance and violence. Like the tortoise, drawing its limbs unto itself, he withdraws his senses from the objects of the senses, which are responsible for desire, anger, delusion, destruction of reason and total ruin.

In another place, Krishna comes back to the subject when he describes the qualities of persons of God-like and demoniac nature, respectively. Fearlessness, purity of mind, steadfastness, charity, self-control, sacrifice, study of the scriptures, austerity, straightforwardness, non-violence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, tranquillity, aversion to slander, compassion to living beings, freedom from avarice, gentleness, modesty, vigour, forgiveness, fortitude, absence of malice and pride, are the qualities of a person of 'divine' nature. Elsewhere has been mentioned the quality of looking equally on all beings — a learned man, a cow, an elephant, a dog and an 'outcaste'. What a grand list of qualities for us to practise and make us fit for a better life in this world and for that beyond.

One can easily list the qualities of a person of 'demoniac' nature — hypocricy, pomp, arrogance, self-conceit, anger, harshness and unwisdom. Such a person knows the path of neither action nor renunciation. He will say that the world is unreal and without moral basis. He is bound by the ties of desire, he strives to amass hoards of wealth by unlawful means, for the gratifications of his senses and thinks that the wealth would be his for all time! What is worse, he develops the attitude of being the lord of everything, mighty and eternal. In effect, he hates the Lord seated within him.

The Lord concludes his description of the divine and demoniac natures with the terse statement that triple

is the gate of hell, destructive of the self, namely, lust, anger and greed, and that the person who renounces these accomplishes his welfare, that is to say, he reaches the ' highest goal ', as elucidated in the scriptures, which ought to be the authority for everyone as regards ' what ought to be done and what ought not to be done '.

The various divine qualities are very much inter-related, any one leading, before long, to others. Likewise, any one bad quality leads to other bad qualities. This was brought home to Arjuna in the early stage of the dialogue itself. The Lord says, for instance, that when a person thinks of the objects of sense, there arise in him desire, anger, bewilderment, destruction of intelligence, leading ultimately to his destruction. When the mind runs after the senses, it carries away the understanding ' even as the gale carries away a ship on the water '. On the other hand, if a person controls desire, he will naturally develop the qualities of courage, truthfulness, patience, freedom from jealousy, anger and arrogance, non-violence and love for all beings. When self-love is replaced by love for others, the self becomes one with other selves. This will lead to *Ahimsa* (non-injury) and performance of work for the good of the world. This feeling of *Samatva,* or the equality of all beings, eventually leads to the realisation of the Supreme being.

There should be little difficulty in accepting the above propositions concerning the good life and evil life. Of course, life must be lived; it is axiomatic as it were. But, the important question is as to what makes people engage in evil thoughts and evil deeds, and how and when they switch on to the path of righteousness. This is not merely a sixty-four dollar question, but a sixty-four million dollar question !

To deal with this question, which was put by Arjuna and answered in a way by Krishna, is to raise the fundamental issue of the freedom of the individual self and the extent of divine influence, control or guidance. The conduct of any person is based upon the qualities he has; evil thoughts/actions spring from the dominance of *Rajas* and *Tamas*. The extent to which a person is subject to these qualities in any embodiment is determined by the past *Karma,* the phenomenon of cause and effect. It has been explained earlier that the *Gunas* or qualities belong to body (matter) and soul, because the two are related to each other intimately. When the soul departs from one body to enter another, it carries with it, in subtle form, the *Gunas,* ' as the wind takes with it the fragrance from the bowers through which it passes '.

What the doctrine of *Karma* means is that man evolves to himself exactly according to his actions (and thoughts too), the process being unbroken by death and proceeding to the next life. *Karma* has been likened to the rule of law in the spiritual world, cause and effect being equivalent. Since death is only disintegration of body, the law of cause and effect continues to operate, so far as the soul is concerned. ' The death of the body does not operate as a bankruptcy court. The old account is carried over '.

The smallest acts and thoughts produce effects like even the tiniest pebble producing a ripple, when thrown into water. ' The most transient and secret thought entertained in the mind ruffles the calm of the Spirit Universal, and the disturbance has to be worked off '. A person's character at the time of death becomes the starting point for the soul in its next birth.

How long ago the process of *Karma* began for any soul it is not possible to say, and it is not worth bother-

ing about. What is important is to take note of the present birth and act to break the chain of birth and death. According to the Hindu view, *Karma* is said to be of three kinds, namely, *Prarabhdam, Sanchitam,* and *Vartamanam. Prarabhdam* is that which has to be ' reaped ' in the present birth. It cannot be changed. It must be gone through and it must be taken as it comes. *Sanchitam* is the accumulated *Karma,* of which a part is in operation in the form of *Prarabhdam. Sanchita Karma* can be modified, by better living. *Vartamanam* is what is being created in the present birth. It can be modified very much, like a person paying up his debt, so that the account is balanced as it were, if not producing a surplus.

The question has been raised whether *Karma* is not fatalism, a destiny imposed from without on the individual. The answer is NO, according to the *Bhagavadgita.* It is not an arbitrary and external agency, but a self-made destiny, imposed from within and one that is continuously being remade. That is to say, *Karma* is not a finished product awaiting us, ' but a constant becoming, in which the future is not only shaped by the past, but is being modified by the present '. Nothing could be more rational and practical than this.

In other words, the *Gita* does not teach a philosophy of determinism and yet it would be wrong to conclude that man is the complete master of himself. The power of God is also there very much, over him. In fact, God is all in all. But, man is also free. This might be regarded as a paradox or contradiction which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. It will emerge that man's freedom, albeit limited, is desired and conferred by God! Man is given a great opportunity by God; he can use it well or ill, and he must reap the consequences. Man's ultimate

goal, of course, is the realisation of the power and glory of God and merging with Him or being close to Him, enjoying His grace. The paths towards this realisation, of duty or action, knowledge and devotion, are discussed in a subsequent chapter.

Summing up, this chapter has covered the topics of the nature of body (matter), self (soul), the *Gunas* or qualities relating to body and soul, some preliminary observations on the way of rising above the qualities, an account of the doctrine of *Karma* or of cause and effect and a mention of the issue of man's free will and freedom *versus* divine omnipotence. The last is undoubtedly the most interesting and important issue that should be considered by any student of religion and philosophy and naturally this theme is the heart of the *Bhagavadgita.* It will be meaningful to discuss this only after we have covered, in some detail, the Gita's exposition of the nature of God or the Supreme Reality. We shall turn to this subject in the next chapter.

Chapter *THREE*

The Nature of God

NUMEROUS writers call the *Bhagavadgita* a *Karmayoga Sastra,* a treatise or scripture on the performance of work/duty (which is another meaning of the word *Karma*), as an end in itself and in a spirit of utter dedication and selflessness. This description is all right as far as it goes, but to this writer the central theme of the *Gita* is God. *It is a book on God and by God.* All the topics discussed in the treatise are concerned directly or indirectly with the many aspects of God — His nature and glories, His immanence and transcendence, how the Supreme Being or Brahman is obscured, from the point of view of finite consciousness, by the principle of *Maya* or ' illusion ', and the remedy against the illusion as consisting of surrender to the Supreme Being, who is an ocean of compassion and mercy even as he is stern in regard to the working of the Law, laid down and administered by Him. Surrender is the culmination of the paths of action (works), knowledge (wisdom) and devotion, one leading to the other and becoming a perfect blend.

The subject of God comes up naturally after a discussion of matter and spirit or body and soul. Granted that matter and spirit are different, what created them,

supports them, guides them, influences them, regulates them and co-ordinates their functioning? Surely, individual souls cannot support themselves and someone must also be responsible for the origin and transformation of matter. That someone is the Supreme Spirit, or Brahman or the Absolute or God, by whatever name called.

It is not difficult to establish the fact of God's presence and His power and pervasiveness. A moment's reflection will bring home the existence of an agency which alone can explain the physical and psychic phenomena which we witness in daily life. But the really difficult matter is that which concerns the relationship of God and the individual; is the individual soul identical with the universal soul, proceeding from the universal soul and going back to it in complete merger? Or are the two quite separate? Or, is it a third type of relationship, namely, the individual souls, along with matter, are attributes of God?

This is an issue which every person has probably to decide for himself. It is an intensely personal matter; perhaps only in the latter part of one's life can one hope to form a reasonably firm view of one's relationship with the Supreme Person. For, God-realisation is not an intellectual affair. It is a matter of experience, by the whole being — head, heart, limbs, eyes and ears!

The physical elements of nature, including the material bodies of animate beings and their sensory organs, constitute *Prakriti* or the ever-changing physical aspect of the universe. Within each animate being is *Purusa,* the soul. Behind all, that is to say *Prakriti* and *Purusa,* is *Purusottama,* the Supreme Being; it is He who holds together all the changes visible, in one organic existence, even as He is their origin. He dwells within and supports and moves everything, but exists apart from all.

The universe moves according to certain 'laws', but this code or system of nature is but the manifestation of God. That is to say, the whole universe of matter, energy and consciousness is an elaborate revelation of God. We observe the physical and moral laws and think that life proceeds as if wholly independent of God, but the truth is that all beings and phenomena are dependent on Him. It is the *Gunas* and pairs of opposites — hate and love, anger and joy, like and dislike, etc.— that cause the delusion that the universe goes on without the support of the Supreme Being. In reality, the laws of nature are the will of God. God is the Law and the Law is God. He rules through the Law, but it must not be assumed that it is the Law that rules and not He.

The *Gunas* or qualities spring from God alone, though it is the very *Gunas* that obscure the divine causation of all phenomena. The *Gunas* are also full of *Maya* or, 'illusion', meaning cause of delusion, preventing the world from recognising the presence and power of God. It is interesting that illusion is caused by God and He also says that it is difficult to overcome the illusion, except by those who take refuge to Him entirely !

According to one of the great preceptors of Vedantic philosophy, Sri Ramanuja, "*Maya* is not illusion, but a tremendous power whose effects are wonderfully variegated and one of its effects may be of the nature of illusion". Nature itself is not an illusion but "by virtue of its immense fecundity it generates all the illusions of mortals". In any event, insofar as nature belongs to God, the illusory effect of nature can only be overcome through surrender to God.

God, according to the *Gita,* is both immanent and transcendent. He extends beyond the cosmic process.

He is "uncaused cause, the unmoved mover". He is without and within all beings. He is unmoving as also moving. He is far away and yet He is near. He is undivided or indivisible, and yet He seems to be divided among beings. He is the creator and the destroyer. All things derive from Him, are supported by Him and taken back unto Him. In a beautiful stanza (Chapter 9, verse 18), Sri Krishna says that He is "The God, the Supporter, the Lord, the Witness, the Abode, the Refuge, the Friend, the seat of Origin, Dissolution (of the World), Foundation, Treasure (and) the imperishable seed".

One might consider that there is contradiction in the statement that God is both immanent and transcendent. This apparent contradiction is explained by an eminent authority on the *Gita,* the late Professor M. Rangacharya, with special reference to the following three stanzas (numbers 4, 5 and 6) of Chapter 9.

> The whole of this world is pervaded by Me, whose form is not manifest. All beings abide in Me; and I do not abide in them.
>
> Again, the beings do not abide in Me. Look at My lordly power! I am the upholder of (all) beings; and I do not abide in the beings: My will brings beings into existence.
>
> Bear in mind that, in whatsoever manner the air, which ever abides in the atmosphere, moves everywhere and is (undoubtedly) great, in that same manner all beings abide in Me.

Professor Rangacharya's comments are as under*:

> This description of the greatness of God is, evidently intended to enable us to see how He is

* *Bhagavadgita,* volume II, G. A. Natesan & Co., 1936.

both immanent and transcendent at the same time: and what cannot fail to strike the attentive student first, in the context, is the simultaneous postulation of contradictory characteristics in relation to God. It is apt to appear to many that immanence and transcendence contradict each other. Many profound philosophical thinkers are known to have expressed the opinion that the pecularity in the greatness of God consists in this description having to be made up of contradictory characteristics. In any case, on understanding the whole aright, the contradictions in the description disappear. Therefore, they are only apparent and do not in any way affect the correctness of the description. Here, we are told that God pervades the whole of this world, and that yet He does not abide in the beings in the world. This is the first contradiction to be explained.

Then again, we are told, that all beings abide in God, and that at the same time the beings do not abide in Him. A little thought will make it clear that the key for the explanation of these apparent contradictions is to be found in the fact that the form of God, as He pervades the whole of the world, is declared to be not manifest. By this, we are distinctly taught that God is a spirit in reality, and that accordingly the manner of His pervasion of the world must be different from that of the pervasion of one material substance by another. When, for instance, a piece of blotting paper is pervaded by ink, the paper is seen to be the container of the ink; in other words, the ink is in the paper. By being in the paper, thus, the ink has its scope of existence limited by the paper.

In respect of the relation of container and contained as between two material substances, it is always the case that the container limits the scope of existence of the contained, so that it is never possible for the contained to transcend the bounds imposed on it by the container. Where, however, this same relation of container and contained happens to be

between a material being and the Divine spiritual essence, it is easily possible for the contained spirit to transcend the bounds of the containing material being. God abides in all beings, because He pervades them. God does not abide in beings, because He, being a spirit, transcends them and is incapable of being limited by them. Such is, according to me, the explanation of the first apparent self-contradiction in the description of God, to which we have now been paying our attention.

The next apparent self-contradiction, which has to be explained is in our having been told that all beings abide in God, and that, at the same time, the beings do not abide in God. Here, God is the container, and the beings are the things contained. Although it is so, we are not entitled to conceive that God holds within Himself all the beings in the world in the manner in which a bag, for instance, holds within itself all its material contents. The reason for this is, because we are told in this very context that, 'whatsoever manner the air, which ever abides in the atmosphere, moves everywhere and is (undoubtedly) great, in that same manner all beings abide in Me'.

From this illustration, we have to learn that the abidance of the beings in God imposes no limitation upon them, and that neither their individuality nor their freedom is affected unfavourably by such abidance in God. Since Sri Krishna says — 'I am the upholder of all beings', we are logically bound to come to the conclusion that all beings do abide in God; and since again, unlike the abidance of one material substance within another material substance, this abidance of all beings in God imposes no limitation upon them and produces no alteration of any kind in their individuality or freedom, it may well be assumed that they do not abide in God; what we have to note here is that, so far as the beings themselves are concerned, there is practically no difference between their abiding in God and not

abiding in God. Accordingly it seems to be true to say, that all beings abide in God and yet at the same time do not abide in God. This is the explanation I offer in relation to the second self-contradictory statement involved in the description of the peculiar greatness of God as given here.

Before proceeding further, it is desirable to note that our close and careful examination of these apparent self-contradictions in the characterisation of God has so far revealed to us the essential spirituality of His divine nature. His all-pervasive immanence in the universe and His unbounded and illimitable transcendence; it has also brought to light the important fact that He is the one support of the whole universe. We are told further that God is the one ultimate source of the universe. Sri Krishna says positively — 'My will brings beings into existence': accordingly, it is because God willed that there should be a world, we have the world with all its variety of beings. What I have translated as 'My will' is *mama atma* in the original Sanskrit: some may doubt the accuracy of the translation. The expression *atman* has more than one meaning, and one of its meanings denotes the mind. Adopting that meaning here, we are led to learn that it is the mind of God which brings beings into existence. Evidently because the mind works through the will, one of our authoritative commentators has interpreted *atman* as the will in the mind. This interpretation is very reasonable and deserves to be accepted. Since the will of God has brought all beings into existence, God Himself has to be taken to be the one ultimate source of the universe.

God is ever vigilant, concerning the welfare of the world. This is revealed by Krishna in two celebrated stanzas (7 and 8) of Chapter 4, which read as under:

Whenever there is decay of righteousness, O Arjuna, and the rise of righteousness, then I create Myself (incarnate Myself in some form).

For the protection of the Good and the destruction of evil-doers, for the firm establishment of righteousness, am I born from age to age.

Closely connected with the question of the immanence and transcendence of God is that concerning the relative merits of the two types of worship, namely, worship of personal God and that of the Unmanifest or impersonal or non-phenomenal God. The question is raised by Arjuna and answered by Sri Krishna, namely, that both modes are all right from God's point of view, but that the worship of the Supreme in the Unmanifested form is more difficult for the embodied ones. Visualising God, apart from the physical and mental phenomena, is difficult for the ordinary being, who is better suited to look upon Him as manifest and describe Him. Of course, in both cases, man can only realise the ' truth ' partially.

The worship of the personal God is really the path of *Bhakti* or loving devotion to the Supreme, whereas the worship of the Unmanifested is the path of *Jnana* or knowledge. In either case, the seeker has to have right conduct, being devoid of hatred to all beings, friendly and being merciful, contented, free from I-ness and mine-ness free from pleasure and pain, love and hatred alike, self-controlled, resolute, and dedicating to God his mind and understanding.

On the question of the relationship of the individual soul to the Supreme Sprit, there are, mainly, three schools of thought in India, all the schools deriving authority for their respective views from the *Gita* and the *Upanisads.* The three schools are called *Advaita, Dvaita* and *Visista-*

dvaita, or non-dualism, dualism and qualified non-dualism, respectively. It should be useful to give the main tenets of these schools.

According to *advaita* school, the *Jiva* or individual soul, and the Lord of the Universe, that is say *Iswara* or *Brahman,* are identical; this is expressed by the phrase 'that thou art'. Salvation is the immediate knowledge of the identity between *jiva* and God. The idea of difference is due to *avidya* or nescience, which is removed by *Jnana,* knowledge of the Supreme. *Brahman* or God alone is real and the world of matter and soul is unreal or *Maya,* that is to say illusion. God is without attributes. The *Advaita* school attaches much more importance to the path of knowledge than to the path of action.

The *Dvaita* school insists on the separateness of the individual soul and the Supreme Soul. *Jiva* is dependent on God whereas the latter is self-existent. The supreme end of life lies in eternal service to God and to humanity. God-realisation does not mean union of the individual soul with the Supreme Being; it is being near Him and similar to Him but not identical with Him.

Visistadvaita is stated to reconcile the extremes of *Dvaita* and *Advaita. Jiva* and matter are regarded as the inseparable attributes of God. The *jiva*-God relationship is like that between the body of an individual and his soul. The soul lives, moves and has its being in God and is controlled by Him. The communion with God is realised mainly through *Bhakti* or love and devotion. God Himself is the embodiment of love, according to this school.

The important thing is that all the three schools accept the supremacy of Brahman or the Supreme Person, as also the operation of the law of *Karma.* These three

approaches contain the most profound discussion of a fundamental issue. Perhaps that is a matter which has to be tackled by every person himself, on the basis of his experience. This is not an issue to be settled by scholars and considered on the basis of reasoning only. It is a matter of the heart and the final view of one's relationship to the Almighty would only emerge, it would seem, at the last second or split second!

However, it would appear that the *Maya* (illusion) concept does not occupy a prominent place in the *Gita,* which deals with the world very much as a real entity. Further, from the practical point of view of God-realisation, even the adherent of the Maya theory has to put in effort to free himself from passion and attachments. Unselfish performance of duties and the shedding of egoism are necessary whether the soul's separate existence is an illusion or whether the soul is a separate entity. If anything, the non-*advaita* approach gives a fillip to such an attitude, besides being simpler to grasp.

The more practical issue is that of human freedom *versus* divine omnipotence. This matter is handled with consummate skill in the *Gita,* it must be said. The conclusion is " God is all in all and man is also free ". Human freedom is conferred and desired by God. As Professor S. S. Raghavachar has put it, based on Ramanuja's commentary*,

> Divine Omnipotence is itself responsible for the maintenance and exercise of human freedom. Man is morally free but that very prerogative and unique power he owes to the controlling immanence

* *Sri Ramanuja on the Gita,* Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mangalore, 1969.

> of God. Dependence upon other factors of the situation and especially on God in a very intimate and fundamental manner does not take away the individual's moral responsibility. Man makes a difference to the situation, though he draws from God that power for making a difference.

In other words, we come back to the instrumentality of *Karma* to explain the moral responsibility of the individual, within the ambit of the freedom given to him by God. Further, without the aid of the *Karma* doctrine we will have to impute partiality to God. Why is one man rich and another man poor? Why is one person wise and another foolish? Is it partiality or caprice on the part of God? The solution that is given in the *Gita* to this dilemma is, as mentioned above, the process of *Karma*, which enables us to combine the idea of the overlordship of God with that of individual responsibility. The Lordship of God is in no way incompatible with either His absolute impartiality or our absolute responsibility for the good and evil that we do. For our sins and virtues, we are responsible and God is absolutely impartial; still, what we feel, will and do are through the power that He gives us. One can call this as a theory of decentralised centralisation, freedom to act at the micro level within a broad macro framework. Apart from its metaphysical aspect, this approach is an eminently practical one for the modern world, as it places a premium on individual effort to secure worthy ends, for the individual and the community.

Man's freedom should also be understood in its proper perspective. His freedom is of a limited character. He derives his strength, character and power from God. In this context, the goals of life of a person

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assume significance. For what purposes should one use his energy, freedom, etc? For material prosperity? Obviously not, except for meeting the minimal needs of the body — *Sahajakama*. Trying to satisfy the cravings of the senses is a hopeless and useless pursuit. The only worthy pursuit is understanding the Supreme Person, after understanding the true nature of individual self. God realisation or *Moksha* comprises the experiential knowledge of God, love of God and union with God.

This takes us to the *Sadhana* or ways of God-realisation. In the *Gita,* three paths have been mentioned and discussed in detail, namely, the paths of action, knowledge and devotion. The school of thought associated with Ramanuja takes devotion to the further stage of ' surrender '. In reality, these paths are not so much alternatives as different stages in God-realisation, and, in the final analysis, they merge into one another, becoming indistinguishable. Let us now proceed to a description of these paths.

Chapter *FOUR*

The Paths of Action, Knowledge and Devotion

THE most remarkable aspect of the *Bhagavadgita* is the synthesis it attempts of a life of action or work on the one hand and of a life of non-attachment and devotion to the Supreme Person on the other. This is achieved through renunciation of the fruit of action, which should be done for the good of the community, and in a spirit of *Yajna,* that is to say sacrifice or offering to God, in gratitude for what has been received from Him.

What binds the soul to the wheel of birth and death is not action, but the desire for the fruit of action, for the individual self. There is a mistaken view that the *Gita* recommends an attitude of *indifference* to the fruits of action and that in fact a person has no right to the fruit of action (vide the most often quoted stanza 47 in Chapter 2). Work must produce fruits. In fact, the *Gita* lays great stress on the performance of work with the utmost efficiency and enthusiasm. In terms of the doctrine of *Karma*, of cause and effect, effort must produce results. So, work should be so organised as to produce excellent results. After performance of one's duty with

efficiency and enthusiasm, one may not worry about fruits, which must follow good effort.

The disposal of the fruits is the crucial matter. What the *Gita* teaches is that the doer must not desire the fruit for himself. In fact, he must renounce the fruit and refrain wholly from the thought of doership while undertaking any work. The fruit must be offered to God and shared by all. This is the doctrine of *Niskama Karma,* desireless action.

The *Gita* advocates the principle of socialism. If there is a stress on ownership and personal enjoyment of fruits, there is superfluous accumulation of wealth and this leads to inequalities and distress. Also, the person attached to his wealth and fruits thereof, is rarely satisfied with what he has and proceeds to accumulate more, largely at the expense of others. This leads to exploitation of the weaker members of society. Therefore, selfishness must not be the motive of work. In order to drive this point home, Krishna thought it necessary to declare emphatically that the doer has no title at all to the fruits of his work. In this way, a person's ability and industry are sublimated for universal good, and this becomes a true way of serving God.

It may be asked if the non-attachment to fruits will not weaken the standard of performance. The answer is clearly in the negative. In fact, this should lead to even better performance, since there is no longer anxiety, which is responsible for nervousness and unsteadiness. Anxiety is caused by selfishness but when this motive is absent, there is no unsteadiness. Further, when one visualises the joy of the possibility of tremendous social good as a result of one's effort, one is led to even better effort. In fact, when one is working for one self, occa-

sionally one feels like resting, even if thereby some profit is forgone, but when one is working for the general good, one may not be inclined to rest at all.

Granted that attachment to the fruits of action leads to misery and the cycle of birth and death, one may ask, as Arjuna did, whether it is not better to renounce action altogether. The Lord's answer is an emphatic NO. This is neither possible nor desirable. It is impossible for any embodied being to live the life of absolute inaction.

The minimum physical needs of the body, or what is called *Sahaja-Kama,* must be met and this calls for a modicum of effort, on the part of practically everyone. What should be avoided is sophisticated desire or *Sankalpa-Kama.*

It is also not necessary to refrain from engaging in work. What is important is to delink selfishness from work. Work should be done as *Yajna* or sacrifice to God, for the simple reason that the ultimate source of power for the performance of all work is God. It is useful to spend a little time on this beautiful concept of *Yajna.* This is the essence of *Karma-Yoga,* harmonising the Vedic path of ritualism and the practical life of work and duty. The *Gita* does not lay much stress on rituals.

Yajna is any self-sacrificing work, undertaken in a spirit of self-dedication, for the welfare of all. It is any activity, personal, communal and national, into which the individual is ready to pour himself forth, entirely in a spirit of service and dedication. Such pouring out is the law by which life evolves. On the lower creation, sacrifice is imposed by strife and continual combats. Its voluntary acceptance, that is to say, self-sacrifice, is the crowning glory of man.

The need for *Yajna* arises from the fact that all beings are mutually linked to one another and are dependent on one another (and they are also dependent on one great Life). In the words of Professor P. N. Srinivasachari*,

> The human body is moulded out of the cosmic stuff and is therefore, a microcosm or miniature cosmos. The constituents of the physical organism of the *jiva* are taken from the physical universe. The cell is reproduced from the parental life. Its food is gathered from the vegetable and the animal kingdom. Its mind stuff is derived from the cosmic source and presided over by the gods that perform functions assigned to them in maintaining the cosmic order. The self is a social being and cannot sustain itself without social help; it owes its moral, and spiritual life to the grace of the *guru*. In this way, the cosmos is one single organism or systematic unity in which there is no gap between atom, cell, sense, self and society. All these are interconnected and form a single universe as opposed to the multiverse of the pluralist.

The mutual dependence also calls for mutual, obligations and mutual sacrifice. *Yajna* is thus the law of inter-dependence and mutual sacrifice; it is essentially giving, pouring forth.

Man was enjoined to offer five daily sacrifices, to Brahman (the Supreme Reality), celestial beings, departed ancestors, nature (vegetable and animal kindom) and fellow men, respectively. The mode of sacrifice also, varied, from entity to entity — prayer and teaching for *Brahman,* oblation into fire for celestial beings, offering of water to departed ancestors, food for the animal king-

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* *The Ethical Philosophy of the Gita,* Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1969.

dom and hospitality to fellow human beings. How practical and noble was the concept of *Yajna*!

Dana, literally meaning gift, is benevolence, without the expectation of any gain. *Dana* may be regarded as an aspect of *Yajna.* The gifting must be done to the deserving, in a spirit of humility. The best type of sacrifice, according to the *Gita,* is the sacrifice of knowledge and wisdom, that is to say, *Jnana-yajna,* rather than sacrifice of material objects. The ultimate object of sacrifice is purification and realising the Supreme.

Work is to be transformed into worship, which in practical terms means serving the entire humanity. Therefore, what should be renounced is not action but the selfish frame of mind behind it. When the selfishness is turned to altruism, work is cleansed of all impurity and it shines indeed. What is otherwise mundane becomes exalted.

In performing work, without being attached to it in a selfish way, man can take God as the model, according to *Gita.* God works in an unwearied pattern and yet He does not ' forfeit His integrity of spirit '. God works for the maintenance of the world-order.

So, it is declared by the Lord in the most emphatic terms that everyone has a duty to engage in work. How is ' duty ' to be determined? It will be noted that the main purpose of the *Gita* poem was to resolve Arjuna's doubts about his duty in the conflict with the *Kauravas.* The *Gita* arose out of a specific problem, that of Arjuna's duty in the circumstances in which he was placed. Arjuna had many doubts about this and the Lord clears them, with the result that Arjuna who had earlier discarded his bow and arrows picks them up to wage the battle against his evil-minded cousins and their vast army.

One's duty or *Dharma* is determined by the endowment with which one is born *and* the environment in which one is placed. The duty so determined, or *Swadharma,* even if imperfectly performed, is better than the duty of another; in fact, ' better death in the discharge of one's own duty; the duty of another is full of danger ', says the Lord. A person's duty is determined by his qualities, the family and the place where he is born and the variety of circumstances enveloping him. There is a constancy about these and they also change, and so one's duty also changes. That is why our people talk of various types of *Dharma,* such as *Kala Dharma, Sthana Dharma, Sthala Dharma, Vayo Dharma* and *Ashrama Dharma,* or the duty in the context of time, position, place, one's age and status in life (that is to say, whether one is a student, householder, etc.).

What this means is that the duty of a person is *mostly* determined for him. He must accept it, not in a spirit of helplessness but with a great deal of enthusiasm, as an opportunity to serve the world and thereby the Supreme Lord. This attitude also makes him perform his duty with skill and efficiency, on which much emphasis is laid in the *Gita. Skilful performance of duty is raised to the level of a spiritual phenomenon* (yoga). The doer must unite himself with his task. The concept of social duty is replaced by divine obligation.

In connection with the nature of one's duty, there arises the relevance of the caste system, which has led to much misunderstanding, not only among Western readers and commentators, but among Indians too. It must be noted that Krishna Himself says that the four ' castes ' emanate from Him. He is their ' author '. *But Krishna was not talking of caste by birth.* What is

referred to in the *Gita* by the Lord is *caste by the quality of* a person and his actions rather than by his birth. The castes constitute predominantly professional classification, in terms of the principle of division of labour. Also, each of the principal professional groups could be associated with a specific *guna* or quality, that is *Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas*. The Brahmin, given to a life of study of the Vedas and other philosophical religious works, teaching, worship, contemplation and preaching, should have preponderantly the *Sattva* quality. Likewise, the *Kshatriya,* the soldier/warrior, should have a large measure of *Rajas,* the same thing being true of the *Vaisya.* The *Sudra* is dominated by *Tamas.*

Although in India the caste system took deep roots on the basis of birth, it should be emphasised that the concept of caste in the *Bhagavadgita* is different. A person born to Brahmin parents may have warrior-like qualities and join the army, as a solider. On the other hand, a person born in a family of *Vaisya,* businessmen, may have strong tendencies for study, austerity and devotion and he should therefore be considered a Brahmin. In fact, it could be said that the ideal of the *Gita* is that everyone should endeavour to become a *Brahmin.*

Krishna, in the concluding chapter of the *Gita,* describes in detail the characteristics of the four-fold classification of persons in terms of their endowment and qualities. According to Him, there is no entity on earth, nor among the Gods in heaven, which is free from the three *gunas,* born of matter. The functions of the four castes are determined in accordance with the inborn qualities of persons. Thus:

Tranquillity, self-control, austerity, purity, forgiveness, straightforwardness, wisdom, insight and

> faith in God, this is the function of the Brahmin, as determined by his own nature.
>
> Valour, heroism, courage, cleverness, dauntlessness in battle, generosity, masterfulness — this is the function of the Kshatriya, as determined by his own nature.
>
> Agriculture, cattle-breeding, and commerce constitute the function of the Vaisya, as determined by his own nature. And the function of the Sudra, as determined by his own nature, is essentially one of service.

Any society requires functional specialisation among its population. It is also not difficult to arrive at the qualifications required of those who have to perform such functions. This idea is found, for instance, in Plato's *Republic,* where we have the philosopher, the soldier and the labourer. Even in a communist society, there is functional classification; the workers, the administrators, the managers, the scientists, etc. This functional division of society makes for efficiency and stability, ensuring moral and material progress.

While a person is free to improve his life, that is to say proceed from a lower *guna* to a higher *guna,* and in fact he is expected to do so, he must also live, by and large, the life for which he is most fitted, by virtue of his endowment and the environment in which he lives. Thereby, he contributes to his good and the good of the community. This constitutes *Swadharma,* one's own duty. To attempt to follow *Paradharma,* or the duty or ways of another person, is fraught with danger. One should not neglect the rule of fitness in the performance of work. Otherwise, there will be neither efficiency nor progress.

Performance of duties, according to one's *Dharma*, may mean some imperfections, but this does not matter. All undertakings, indeed, are enveloped, by chances of defect, 'as fire by smoke'. Further, Krishna says that one who does a duty laid down by his nature, does not incur sin. Thus, if a soldier kills a person in a righteous war, he commits no sin. It will thus be observed again that *the performance of duty is raised to the moral and religious plane.*

At the same time, it should be noted that there is no such thing as superior or inferior type of duty. Every type of duty is essential to the welfare of the community and every worker, regardless of what and where he works, is equally honourable. *Samatva* or equality is one of the great qualities on which repeated stress is laid in the *Gita.*

The proposition that from the points of view of individual good and the welfare of society, a person must perform his duties, with efficiency and enthusiasm, and in accordance with his endowment and environment, will be accepted without reserve. It is eminently rational. It is also not difficult to accept the position that in performing duty, one should not be obsessed with the matter of fruits of action for oneself. Good action is bound to yield good results, which should be shared in the widest possible manner. Further, action in a detached way is far superior to renunciation of action; in fact, total renunciation of action is not possible for an embodied soul.

If we stop at this point, then all that has been said on the performance of duty constitutes what one might call a theory of management with an ethical bias. Of, course, the *Bhagavadgita* is an excellent treatise on

management and it is also a great book of ethics. But it is something more. As mentioned more than once, it is a spiritual book, wanting to take man to the Supreme Being. In other words, the disinterested performance of duty is regarded in the *Gita* as a way of God-realisation. Hence the expression *Karma marga,* the path of works or duty or action, for God-realisation.

To repeat, work is a means of worship, a form of *Yajna* or sacrifice, the essence of which is returning to God what was brought forth as a result of His grace. This is like the recycling process, so essential for conservation of resources, public good and for the continuation of the cosmic process. The performance of duties as offering to God achieves the twin objective of efficiency and freedom from anxiety regarding the results of action. He who does everything in the name of God, without the feeling of I-ness and mine-ness, and offers the fruits of the effort to God, is always near God. That is to say, God-realisation is easy through the path of action.

At this stage, we must turn to a consideration of two what are generally regarded as clear alternative paths to God-realisation, namely, the path of knowledge or wisdom (*Jnana-marga*) and the path of loving devotion (*Bhakti-marga*).

The various paths are also called as various types of *Yoga,* namely, *Karma-Yoga, Jnana-Yoga* and *Bhakti-Yoga.* 'Yoga' here has the meaning of technique or discipline of achieving union with the Supreme Being. The word *Yoga* is also used in other senses, but allied ones. *Yoga* is intuitive knowledge of the self. Every Chapter of the *Gita* is called a particular *Yoga.* The *Gita* as a whole is called *Yoga Sastra,* or the science of *Yoga* and Krishna is often referred to as *Yogacharya,*

the preceptor of *Yoga*, or *Yogeswara*, the Lord of *Yoga*. The essence of *Yoga* is to seek knowledge of the self and the Supreme. and the union of the former with the latter.

A careful study of the *Gita*, according to this humble writer, reveals that the three approaches are not so much alternative paths as different stages in the evolution of a single path. In fact, one might go further and say that the three are an integral whole, though conceptually they might appear to be different. Let us go in some detail into the conventionally distinct paths of knowledge and devotion. Actually, the main elements of these paths have been given in earlier Chapters. It is now mainly a question of putting labels, as it were.

Jnana-marga is the path of knowledge or wisdom. *Jnana* is not so much intellectual pathway to perfection as spiritual wisdom. This path consists of the discrimination between Self and non-Self and recognition of the existence of the Supreme Self, supporting, guiding and controlling matter and soul. *Jnana* is essentially intuitive knowledge of the Self. *Jnana-marga* naturally requires worldly renunciation, self-control, meditation and mental concentration. This path calls for discrimination (*Viveka*) and dissociation (*Vairagya*).

Now about the relative merit of the path of wisdom. In the first place, it may be argued that not all persons, in fact, a relatively small number only, are competent to pursue the *Jnana-marga*, by virtue of their nature and circumstances. More important, the path of knowledge does require some confirmation of its strength and some involvement in action is helpful to the aspirant in this regard. Self-knowledge is not merely a process of logical abstraction. It needs the support of action. Further,

since *Jnana-marga* can be practised only by a relatively small number, the *Jnani,* that is to say the person who has acquired wisdom through renunciation and meditation, should engage in the path of action so as to set a proper example to others, in whose interest it is to pursue the way of action.

But, what is even more important is the consideration that the *Karma-marga,* carried to its full, includes some key elements of *Jnana* and therefore the follower of *Karma-yoga* does not miss the benefits accruing from *Jnana-yoga*. For, the follower of *Karma-yoga* has to have the awareness of the real nature of the individual self and the supremacy of Brahman and his engaging in action is in the spirit of offering to the Supreme Person. In particular, he must be free from the feeling that he is the doer. This is, undoubtedly, an aspect of *Jnana.*

In the words of Professor S. S. Raghavachar*,

> If that awareness of the nature of the self is kept up in and through action, the action becomes a form or embodiment of Knowledge itself. If that awareness becomes an integral factor in action, then that knowledge is nothing but a form or aspect of action itself. In short, this is a process of spiritualising action and of concretizing knowledge. Knowledge and action can each be looked upon as the substance of which the other is the form. This intimate fusion of the two is what is propounded in the verse under discussion.
>
> How can what is obviously action be considered a form of knowledge? If a man's actions are free from the desire for fruits and if he is free from the delusion that he is the material frame with which

* *Sri Ramanuja on The Gita*

> he happens to be associated, then the wise describe that enlightened man as one whose fire of knowledge has destroyed the binding effects of all his past deeds. His action is just an utterance of his knowledge, for it is the latter that is singled out for appreciation.

The verse, referred to above by Professor Raghavachar, bringing out the essential oneness of the paths of action and knowledge, is as under (Chapter 4, Verse 18).

> He who seeks inaction in action, and action in inaction, he is wise among men, he is harmonious (a *Yogi*), even while performing all action.

Professor Srinivasachari has brought out vividly the complementary nature of the *Karma* and *Jnana* paths. According to him, *Niskama Karma,* the path of disinterested action, is a rather negative account of duty; it has to be reinterpreted in terms of the philosophy of spirit. The *Karma Yogin* must shed egoism. *Doing* good is not enough; *being* good is required. From disinterested action, one should proceed to spiritual spontaneity. Without *Jnana, Karma* may become mechanical. Mere *Jnana,* without the dynamic power of *Karma,* is emptied of content. Professor Srinivasachari calls *Jnana* and *Karma* as the head and trunk of a body; both are indispensable. Instinct and reason are harmonised and there is sublimation of action.

What one might call the practical identity of the paths of action and knowledge also puts the aspirant on the path of *Yoga* proper, that is to say, the technique of meditation and mental concentration for forcing 'the passage from the narrow ego to the transcendent personality.

The spirit tears itself away from its prison house, stands out and reaches its own innermost being'. The fundamental characteristics of a *Yogin,* that is to say, a successful practitioner of *Yoga,* are three:

(1) Equanimity, a condition of tranquillity undisturbed by the pairs of opposites — pleasure and pain, heat and cold, hatred and love, honour and insult. . .

(2) Indifference to all material values.

(3) A feeling of absolute equality towards all beings, which later leads to the perception of God in all selves.

The practitioner of *Yoga* must also be moderate in the matter of food, sleep, play and exertion. Neither excessive indulgence nor undue privation is recommended. A *Yogin* is likened to a lamp placed in a windless place; it flickereth not. The mind is withdrawn from all distraction of desires and it functions with steadfast luminosity of knowledge. The development of this attitude comes out of practice. The Lord assures Arjuna that even if a person, who has faith, wanders away from attaining perfection in *Yoga,* he does not suffer. Such a person is reborn in a pure and blessed house, in which he could recommence his practice of *Yoga.*

It is declared by the Lord that the *Yogin* is superior to the performer of austere penances, the man of knowledge and action. After realisation of the self, the next step for the *Yogin* is realisation of God, through devotion and love, or *Bhakti-marga* or *Bhakti-yoga.*

The essential aspects of Bhakti have been covered in an earlier Chapter, while discussing the nature of God. *Bhakti* is a relationship of trust and love to a personal God. It is the drawing of the human soul near to the divine ' by contemplation of God's power, wisdom and goodness, by constant rememberance of Him with a

devout heart, by conversing about His qualities with others, by singing His praises with fellowmen, and by doing all acts as His service'. The devotee turns his entire being to God.

Bhakti is not an intellectual affair. It is utter humility on the part of the devotee *vis-a-vis* God. The devotee is emptied of his self and God takes possession of him. We must empty ourselves of all desires, pride, knowledge and sense of possession.

The path of devotion has elements of the paths of action and knowledge and yet conceptually it is a category by itself. There is no need for any elaborate rites nor the speculative knowledge of the divine. There is a variant of the path of *Bhakti*, known as *Prapatti*. It is probably more correct to say that the culmination of the path of *Bhakti* is *Prapatti*. This is the path of absolute trust in and surrender to God. There is a feeling of utter helplessness on the part of the devotee and complete faith in God's mercy to take care of him. The doctrine of surrender, it should be added, is present in other religions too.

The foregoing brief account of the various paths of God-realisation indicates that all the paths have much in common. Action, knowledge, contemplation, devotion and surrender are present in all the paths, in varying degrees. It is comparable to the position of the three *Gunas*. Everyone has something of each of these, but one of these is predominant in him. It is also customary to regard the three paths as in fact three stages in the spiritual ascent, first *Karma-marga*, then *Jnana-marga* and finally *Bhakti-marga*. *Karma-marga* constitutes the foundation of the edifice and *Bhakti* the summit.

The inter-dependence of the three approaches to God-realisation is expressed by Mahatma Gandhi as follows: 'Without *Bhakti* human effort by itself will not succeed and, without *Jnana, Bhakti* will not bear fruit. Hence we see at places *Bhakti* or *Jnana* treated as a means which helps in doing the right *Karma*'. Gandhiji has also put the relationship of these by saying that 'Where *Jnana* and *Karma* unite, *Bhakti* will follow as a matter of course'. To quote another eminent philosopher-statesman of India, Rajaji, 'It (*Bhakti*) is, however, not an alternative to, but a complement of, the practice of an unselfish performance of the duties that fall to one's lot. There is no question as to which is the more important of the two, the seeking of Grace or the performance of duty. Either may be considered as the primary and the other as the complementary part of the *Gita* teaching'.

Yet another eminent philosopher, who adorned the President's office, Professor S. Radhakrishnan, has written convincingly of the integral character of the three paths*. Let us quote:

> We can reach the goal of perfection, attain the saving truth in three different ways, by a knowledge of Reality (jnana) or adoration and love (bhakti) of the Supreme Person or by the subjection of the will to the Divine purpose (karma). These are distinguished on account of the distribution of emphasis on the theoretical, emotional and practical aspects. Men are of different types, reflective, emotional or active but they are not exclusively so. At the end, knowledge, love and action mingle

* *The Bhagavadgita*, George Allen and Unwin, 1949.

together. God Himself is *sat, cit, ananda*, reality, truth and bliss. To those seeking knowledge, He is Eternal Light, clear and radiant as the sun at noonday, in which is no darkness; to those struggling for virtue, He is Eternal Righteousness, steadfast and impartial; and to those emotionally inclined, He is Eternal Love and Beauty of Holiness. Even as God combines in Himself these features, man aims at the integral life of spirit. Cognition, will and feeling, though logically distinguishable, are not really separable in the concrete life and unity of mind. They are different aspects of the one movement of the soul.

That the three paths are in the nature of ' unity in diversity ' is well explained by Sri Aurobindo:*

> The argument of the Gita resolves itself into three great steps by which action rises out of the human into the divine plane leaving the bondage of the lower for the liberty of a higher law. First, by the renunciation of desires and a perfect equality works have to be done as a sacrifice by man as the doer, a sacrifice to a deity who is the supreme and only Self though by him not yet realised in his own being. This is the initial step. Secondly, not only the desire of the fruit, but the claim to be the doer of works has to be renounced in the realisation of the Self as the equal, the inactive, the immutable principle and of all works as simply the operation of universal Force, of the Nature-Soul, Prakriti, the unequal, active, mutable power. Lastly, the supreme Self has to be seen as the supreme Purusha governing this Prakriti, of whom the soul in Nature is a partial manifestation, by whom all works are directed, in a perfect transcendence, through Nature.

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* *Essays on the Gita*, Tenth Edition, Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

> To Him, love and adoration and the sacrifice of works have to be offered; the whole being has to be surrendered to Him and the whole consciousness raised up to dwell in this divine consciousness so that the human soul may share in His divine transcendence of Nature and of His works and act in a perfect spiritual liberty.
>
> The first step is Karmayoga, the selfless sacrifice of works, and here the Gita's insistence is on action. The second is Jnanayoga, the self-realisation and knowledge of the true nature of the self and the world, and here the insistence is on knowledge; but the sacrifice of works continues and the path of Works becomes one with but does not disappear into the path of Knowledge. The last step is Bhaktiyoga, adoration and seeking of the Supreme Self as the Divine Being, and here the insistence is on devotion; but the knowledge is not subordinated, only raised, vitalised and fulfilled, and still the sacrifice of works continues; the double path becomes the triune way of knowledge, works and devotion. And the fruit of the sacrifice, the one fruit still placed before the seeker, is attained, union with the divine Being and oneness with the supreme divine Nature.

Two things stand out in the *Gita* with the utmost prominence; they are stated again and again, by Krishna. One is the necessity of human effort and the other is the even greater necessity of divine grace. The former is the necessary condition and the latter the sufficient condition, to borrow a mathematical analogy. It is God who gives us opportunities and a certain freedom of operation. He watches over us benignly, guides and helps us in the ascent of the spiritual hill. It is best to quote some stanzas, from the concluding (18th) Chapter of the Gita, as to how Krishna put this matter to Arjuna. The cream of the *Gita* is to be found in the following stanzas:

Man reaches perfection by each being intent on his own duty. Listen thou how perfection is won by him who is intent on his own duty. (45)

He from Whom all beings emanate, by Whom all this is pervaded, worshipping Him by his own duty a man wins perfection. (46)

Better is one's own duty, though imperfectly carried out, than the well executed duty of another. He who does the duty laid down by his own nature incurs not sin. (47)

One must not give up the work for which one is fitted by nature, even though it may be attended with imperfections. For, all kinds of work are enveloped by chances of defect, as fire with smoke. (48)

He whose understanding is unattached everywhere, who has subdued his self and from whom desire has fled — he comes through renunciation to the supreme state transcending all work. (49)

Hear from Me, in brief, O Son of Kunti (Arjuna), how, having attained perfection, he attains to the Brahman, that supreme consummation of wisdom. (50)

He who is endowed with a pure mind, who controls himself by the power of his will, renouncing sound and other objects of sense, and casting aside desire and aversion, who resorts to solitude, who eats lightly, who has his speech, body and mind well under control, who is ever engaged in the *yoga* of meditation, who holds fast to detachment, giving up egoism, violence, pride, desire, anger, and property, who is free from the sense of possession and is tranquil — he becomes worthy of attaining Brahman (The Eternal). (51–53)

(Such a person) having attained the *Brahman* and being tranquil in spirit, neither sorrows nor desires. Regarding all beings as alike, he acquires supreme devotion to Me. (54)

Through devotion he comes to know Me, what My measure is and who I am in truth; then, having known Me in truth, he forthwith enters into Me. (55)

Even though he may be doing all kinds of work, he attains the eternal imperishable abode, by taking refuge in Me and through My grace. (56)

Making over all work unto Me with a discriminating intelligence, holding Me to be the Supreme Being and seeking a state of mind conducive to union (with Me), concentrate your mind on Me always. (57)

Fixing thy thought on Me, thou shalt, by My grace, cross over all difficulties; but if, from self-conceit, thou wilt not listen (to Me), thou shalt perish. (58)

If, out of pride, you think, " I will not fight ", this determination of yours is futile. (For) Nature will compel you to fight. (59)

That which, through delusion, thou wishest not to do, O Son of Kunti (Arjuna), that thou shalt do even against thy will, fettered by thy own acts born of thy nature. (60)

The Lord abides in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing them to turn round by His power as if they were mounted on a machine. (61)

Seek refuge with Him alone, O Arjuna, with all your heart. Through His grace, you will obtain supreme peace and (the) eternal abode. (62)

Thus have I taught you (the) knowledge more mysterious than (any) mystery. After considering this fully, do as you please. (63)

Listen again to My supreme word, the most secret of all. Well beloved art thou of Me, therefore I shall tell thee what is good for thee. (64)

Fix your mind upon Me; become devoted unto Me; worship Me; bow down unto Me. You will reach Me alone. I truly make (this) assurance (as) you are dear to Me. (65)

Completely renouncing all *dharmas* (duties......), seek Me alone as refuge. I will release you from all sins. Do not grieve. (66)

The last stanza (that is to say, 66) is regarded by all commentators as the most important one in the *Gita*. In fact, it is often referred to as *Charama Sloka*, or the 'final' verse in the *Gita*. Numerous commentaries have been written on the stanza, interpreting it variously, in accordance with the general approach of the writer to the work as a whole. It is useful to devote a little chapter to this verse, since it is supposed to be the final summing-up by Sri Krishna and contains the essence of the *Gita*.

Chapter *FIVE*

Abandoning All Dharmas . . . .

PROBABLY in no other philosophical and religious work has so much importance been given to just two stanzas, as in respect of stanza 47 in Chapter 2 and 66 in Chapter 18. A brief reference was made to the earlier stanza in the previous chapter. The stanza reads as under:

> To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction.

This stanza calls for an unselfish performance of one's duties, without worrying about fruits, which are intended to be enjoyed by the community, the whole act of duty being in the nature of an offering to God. This stanza, as was mentioned earlier, constitutes the essence of *Karma-yoga*.

The first impression which one gathers on reading stanza 66 (Chapter 18) is that, in the final analysis, Sri Krishna is telling Arjuna that the pursuit of *Karma-yoga* and, for that matter, the other paths too (that is to say *Jnana-yoga* and *Bhakti-yoga*), is not, strictly speaking,

necessary for attaining the Lord. A simple act of surrender to the Supreme Deity is all that is necessary for securing salvation. In fact, this interpretation is supported by some writers. We will come back to this a little later.

Dharma has been defined as 'that which supports, that which holds together the people'. In the *Gita*, the word has been used in several senses, namely, righteousness, virtue, religion, morality, a characteristic quality and duty. However, the most common meaning attached to this word is the idea of duty. The duty that is referred to here is that relating to God-realisation. The duty consists of the pursuit of the three paths mentioned earlier, namely, *Karma-yoga, Jnana-yoga* and *Bhakti-yoga*.

Then why is Arjuna enjoined to abandon or renounce the duty towards God-realisation? Many commentators have taken the view that the renunciation that is referred to in this stanza does not refer to the renunciation of the pursuit of the paths of God-realisation; it refers to the renunciation of the egoistic idea of doership and renunciation of the fruits of the effort. In this sense, stanza 66 merely restates the philosophy enshrined in stanza 47 (of Chapter 2), except that the latter stanza deals mainly with *Karma-yoga*.

The renunciation of the doer-ship and fruits becomes easy when the performance of the various types of duty is regarded as an act of love rather than as a mandate of discipline, a command or a peremptory injunction. The performance of one's duty is regarded as carrying out the will of God. By leaving it to HIM the entire responsibility for the work as also the fruits thereof, the performance of duty becomes an effortless thing, a thing of joy. When the matter is looked at this way, it also

saves the devotee a lot of worry of deciding upon the question of what is one's duty and what it is not. This is not to say that the devotee is indifferent to the moral law. It is only a question of trying to put the real responsibility for all actions on God Himself. This will free the performance of duties from all indecision and tension. One need not be worried at all about one's acts of omission and commission, leaving everything safe in His hands. This may be regarded as completion of the process of *Bhakti*. The devotee should regard himself as only an instrument of the Divine (*Nimittamatram Bhava Savyasacin*).

There is another interpretation of the stanza, according to which the word *Dharma* stands for the means of salvation. That is to say, the devotee is enjoined to give up the paths of *Karma, Bhakti* and *Jnana* and regard the Lord Himself as both the means and the end. The idea underlining this view is that the aspirant lacks the requisite knowledge of the means of salvation, and does not have the capacity for fruitful practice and is impatient to await the full maturation of *Bhakti*. He is also not capable of fulfilling the other accessory conditions laid down in the Scriptures. The devotee's faults and imperfections are too many in relation to his capacity for emancipation from sins. In such a situation, there is no point in the devotee's bothering about the traditional means of securing salvation. In an utter spirit of helplessness and absolute trust in God, the aspirant surrenders himself to God wholly, placing in HIM the entire burden of securing release from the cycle of birth and death.

According to this interpretation, God, in His infinite knowledge, power and compassion, assumes the responsibility for the devotee and showers on him HIS boundless

and omnipotent grace. In fact, the surrender to God is without any condition and even without any expectation. According to this view, even the desire to attain salvation is not justified. It must be left entirely to the will of God as to what He wants to do with the devotee. To seek favours or put conditions is the antithesis of the doctrine of surrender.

Stanza 66 is very much addressed to intellectuals, who often engage fruitlessly on discussions on what constitutes *Dharma* and *Adharma*. It is a call to the aspirant to follow the spirit of utter devotion and dedication to the Almighty rather than be concerned with the forms of devotion. In this sense, surrender or *Prapatti* is a complete, self-sufficient and direct means of winning God's grace.

The above ideas are also brought out in beautiful paragraphs written by Dr. Radhakrishnan. They are worth quoting.*

> We should willingly yield to His pressure, completely surrender to His will and take shelter in His love. If we destroy confidence in our own little self and replace it by perfect confidence in God, He will save us. God asks of us total self-giving and gives us in return the power of the spirit which changes every situation.
>
> Arjuna was perturbed by the various duties, ritualistic and ethical, that the war will result in the confusion of castes and indifference to the ancestors as well as in the violation of sacred duties of reverence for the teachers, etc. Krishna tells him not to worry about these laws and usages but to trust Him and bow to His will. If he consecrates his life, actions,

* *The Bhagavadgita.*

feelings and thoughts, and surrenders himself to God, He will guide him through the fight of life and he need have no fears. Surrender is the easiest way to self-transcendence. " He only is fit to contemplate the Divine light who is the slave to nothing, not even to his virtues ". Ruysbroeck.

If we are to realise our destinies, we must stand naked and guileless before the Supreme. We, now and then, vainly try to cover ourselves up and hide the truth from the Lord. That way the gopis failed to realise their destinies.

We do not even seek God as await His touch. When we turn to Him and let Him fill our whole being, our responsibility ceases. He deals with us and leads us beyond all sorrow. It is an unreserved surrender to the Supreme who takes us up and raises us to our utmost possible perfection. Though the Lord conducts the world according to fixed laws and expects us to conform to the law of right action based on our nature and station in life, if we take shelter in Him, we transcend all these. A seemingly outer help must come to man, for his soul cannot deliver itself from the trap in which it is caught by its own effort. When we wait on God without words and desire only His taking hold of us, the help comes. Cf. " He, who cares nothing for merits and demerits even though taught by Me, who, setting aside all duties, serves Me alone, is the greatest ".

Stanza 66 is also differently interpreted by the three leading preceptors of the *Vedanta,* namely, Sankara, Madhva and Ramanuja, reflecting their respective philosophy of non-dualism, dualism and qualified monism. These views are succinctly described by Professor M. Rangacharya.* Let us quote him:

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* *The Bhagavadgita*, Volume III.

Sankaracharya observes that Sri Krishna teaches in this verse the right vision which is the fruit of the successful pursuit of *Karma-yoga* and which constitutes the essence of the *Vedanta*. By the term *dharma* he appears to understand religious rites in general. All religious rites, performed as they are for some kind of fruit, have a binding tendency. When the performance of *dharmas* is forbidden, Sankaracharya goes on to observe, the performance of *adharmas* is also by implication prohibited. In other words, abstinence from all actions is taught here. We are asked to live that life of wisdom which has arisen above the categories of good and evil.

Madhvacharya observes that the *dharma-tyaga* that is enjoined cannot be anything other than *phala-tyaga*, for we cannot otherwise explain the subsequent command to fight. And he quotes in support the line which declares that he is called a *tyagin* who abandons the fruits of his actions (XVIII, 11). By the term *sarva-dharman* has also been understood all *dharmas* contrary to *sarana-gati*, the worship of other gods and expiatory rites for errors committed in the observance of *bhakti-yoga*. Yet another view construes the *sloka* thus: If you give up all *dharmas*, then, for expiation, seek Me as refuge. It has also been suggested that the teaching of the *sloka* must be applied only to those, who, like the Sudras, have no *dharmas* prescribed for them in the *sastras*. It is, however, difficult to see how, on such views as these, we can explain the active commandment to abandon completely all *dharmas*.

According to Ramanujacharya, the term *dharma* may mean either the fruits of the disciplines of *karma*, *jnana* and *bhakti* or the expiatory rites enjoined for wiping away our past sins in order to fit us for the practice of *bhakti-yoga*. In the former case, the verse may be understood to teach that we must practise *karma-yoga*, *jnana-yoga*, and *bhakti-yoga* without any desire for salvation as such. For even the desire for emancipation is in the last

resort a selfish desire. In the latter case, seeking refuge at the feet of God is regarded as a substitute for various expiatory ceremonies and rites. From this it is an easy step to take the view that *saranagati* is a substitute for all kinds of rites whatsoever and for all efforts after perfection of self. That Ramanuja was not unaware of the saving power of self-surrender comes out clearly from that beautiful and moving prayer of his, which goes by the name of *Saranagati-gadya*. Therein, oppressed by the weight of his countless sins of commission and omission, he throws himself entirely at the mercy of the Lord, and represents himself to have received as assurance from the Lord to the effect that, out of the abundance of His love, He has forgiven those faults and will receive the suppliant to His bosom in due course.

It is clear that the above points of view contain only shades of difference. In a sense, they constitute a single principle and this is that the pathway of self-surrender is, in the words of Professor S. S. Raghavachar:*

> a method of all-sufficing efficacy. It can complete the work of Bhakti, it can bring about Bhakti and it can also accomplish by itself what Bhakti in its ideal condition accomplishes. It can complete, produce and replace Bhakti. While Bhakti both for its emergence and fullness of efficacy needs Prapatti, Prapatti does not require the aid of Bhakti in that manner. This indispensability and all-accomplishing power of Prapatti is due to the fact that it consists of surrender to God for making Him work as the means for realizing the end in question. Therefore all the exaltation that Prapatti receives is just an acknowledgement of the infinite potency of Divine Grace.

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* *Sri Ramanuja on the Gita.*

At the conclusion of the discourse, Krishna enquires of Arjuna:

> Has this been heard by you, O Arjuna, with one-pointed attention? Has your delusion, born of ignorance, been destroyed?

It will be noted that in stanza 63 Krishna had told Arjuna that after considering what He had taught Arjuna, he should do what he desired. The final remark of Krishna is in the same spirit of an enlightened teacher, who, after he has done his job competently, leaves the final responsibility to the disciple as to what he should do.

Arjuna gave a categorical answer to the Lord's enquiry, as under:

> Gone is my delusion. Memory has come back to me, O Krishna, through Your grace. I stand free from doubt. I will act according to Your word.

We know from the *Mahabharata* the story that Arjuna decided to involve himself in the war and the *Kauravas* were all destroyed, though the victory of *Pandavas* turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory, in that there was large-scale slaughter on both sides. In the *Gita* itself, there is a clear indication of Arjuna's engaging himself in the battle. For, in the very last stanza, uttered by Samjaya, there is a reference to Krishna as Yogeswara (the Lord of *Yoga*) and to Arjuna as *Dhanurdhara,* that is to say, the archer.

The stanza reads as under:

> Wherever there is Sri Krishna, the Lord of *Yoga,* and Arjuna, wielding his bow, there, it is my conviction, will be fortune, victory, prosperity and enduring righteousness.

In the beginning of the dialogue, Arjuna had cast away his bow and arrows and at the conclusion of the dialogue, he has taken them up again, to engage in the righteous war.

This concludes an account of the Divine Song of Krishna-Arjuna Dialogue. The key-note of the *Gita* is thus the blending of the ethical, philosophical and religious aspects of life. It takes full note of the realities of life and nature, that is to say endowment and environment, and points towards the path of moral and spiritual betterment. This effort goes by the name *Yoga* and it is a progressive and multiple process. The main aspects of this *Yoga* are:

(i) The realisation of the soul as an immaterial, immutable and eternal entity, distinct from the ephemeral, mutable and material body;

(ii) The awareness of the presence of the Supreme Being, as the cause, support, guide and monitor of the world of matter and individual souls, and the cultivation of an attitude of devotion and love to Him;

(iii) The development of *Samatva,* the feeling of affinity of all selves and inanimate matter too, this leading to non-injury and service to fellow men and beings;

(iv) The cultivation of an attitude of discrimination and detachment, with control over the senses and evenness in regard to pairs of opposites — success and failure, joy and sorrow,........

(v) Performance of duty, in accordance with one's endowment and environment, with efficiency and enthusiasm, in an unselfish way, without worrying about results, *without any trace of egoism,* and in a spirit of offering to God, that is to say, transforming work to worship.

(vi) Surrender to God's grace, after performing one's duties to the best of one's capacity and understanding, in full confidence of God's mercy and benevolence.

(vii) Man has freedom, albeit limited, to shape his destiny, in accordance with the law of *Karma*, or the phenomenon of cause and effect.

The *Gita* strikes a remarkable note of harmony in dealing with the fundamental problems of the philosophies of nature, spirit and God. It is first and last a *Dharma Sastra*, a treatise on human conduct in relation to matter, soul and God. The *Gita* helps one live a good life in this world and secure merit to reach God.

It is brought out in the *Gita*, in an admirable manner, that intellectual illumination and ecstasy must have their consummation in ethical exaltation, connoting the abandonment of the individualistic outlook and ceaseless and loving service to all *jivas*, human and animal. Thus, the ascent to divine life becomes practically identical with service to community. " God above is God in man and nature, and spirituality and service are the two aspects of the same religious exercise ". The *Gita* is a treatise par excellence for purifying and sublimating our instincts and impulses. The path which the *Gita* teaches is simple, eminently rational and remarkably free from ritualistic dogma. It is able to harmonise the triple aspects of man as an individual, a member of the community and a portion of the Divine Being. In short, the Divine Song has a soul-stirring melody and harmony, to enable man to soar Godward.

The *Gita* is said to contain the quintessence of *Vedanta*, the Hindu philosophy of religion. According to a popular

verse, the *Upanisads* are cows, Krishna is the milker, Arjuna is the calf and the *Gita* is the nectar-like milk, As one eminent exponent of the *Gita* has put it succinctly, everyone of us is a victim of the Arjuna-Disease in varying degrees and we require constantly the Krishna-Treatment. Krishna succeeded in making Arjuna 'get up and fight'. The *Gita* is a clarion call to all of us to fight the battle of life with courage, wisdom, faith, perseverance, foresight and selflessness.

The *Gita* path is simple and easy, but one could say that this is like the simplicity of tight-rope walking. You are censured for not performing your duty, but you are not to be entitled to the fruits thereof, nor even to a claim as the doer of anything! He who has practised a great deal and is wholly alert and calm is a successful tight-rope walker. The development of the attitude of mind taught in the *Gita* is an evolutionary process in discipline, calling for concentrated effort on a continuing basis. However, the joy of performance of duty without any thought of reward and without the feeling of doership will be found to be both intense and enduring.

Chapter *SIX*

The Eternal Relevance of the Gita

THE *Gita* is a book of eternal relevance for mankind. The frontiers of science are ever widening and the most marvellous discoveries and inventions are in store for us, in comparison with which what we have achieved so far will look like a speck. More and more of science does not diminish the need for philosophy, ethics and religion. Under any circumstances, the need for these will be even greater. One cannot assume that the quality of man will necessarily improve with scientific and material progress. There is no conflict at all between science and religion. Scientific progress, if anything, is an important means of exploring the mysteries of nature and realising the glory of that Super-Architect's power and pervasiveness. Basically, science can only tell us facts, that is to say 'what'; so far as 'why' is concerned, only philosophy and religion can perhaps provide the ultimate answers.

We have thus far studied the *Gita* essentially as a book on God-realisation. All other aspects of this treatise are subordinate to this main theme. Even if we look at the *Gita* from the point of view of the mundane world, its enormous significance for our daily life is quite

evident, in our various capacities, as a member of a family, a farmer, factory worker, manager, politician, minister, civil servant, diplomat, soldier, businessman, industrialist, teacher, doctor or social worker. The *Gita* has clear answers to our questions, doubts and policy conflicts. It clears our confusions and puts us firmly on the path of decisive action. It makes for a life free from personal tension and social friction.

Even in the sphere of international relations, the *Gita* spirit can do much to promote and preserve peace and harmony among nations, through pursuit of the canons of *Dharma*. The *Gita* spirit also means that there must be no hesitation to use force if any country or group of countries were to persist in unrighteous activities, detrimental to the interests of other countries, without listening to the voice of reason and conciliation. This awareness should also help keep under check unrighteous conduct on the part of nations.

Let us look at the significance of the *Gita* from the economic angle, since everywhere the economic aspect is today the most dominant aspect of national life and international relations. It could be said that the *Gita* has excellent principles of economic growth and prosperity. Its great emphasis on the performance of duty with skill and enthusiasm, and its theory of division of labour, if followed, will result in dynamic growth of agriculture and industry and bring about a harmonious growth rate of the economy.

It is now being increasingly recognised that equitable distribution of wealth among the people is as important for happiness as enlarging the national cake. The prescription in the *Gita* of selflessness, *Samatva* or equality and *Dana*, that is to say benevolence, and *Loka*

Samgraha, welfare of all, should help in the distribution of national income equitably. Marked inequalities of income and wealth are quite inconsistent with the spirit of the *Gita*, which preaches unmistakably the doctrine of good of the community. One should put forth the best effort which one is capable of, but one should not hanker after the fruits of one's efforts, which should go to the common pool, to be shared equitably.

It may not be wrong to say that the *Gita* lends support to the principle of communism, but it is communism of the *Sattvic* variety, based on truth and non-violence. Its social philosophy is founded on ethics, on the principles of trusteeship, altruism and love. Those who are more intelligent, enterprising and capable, have a duty to share their superior skills with others on the basis of equality.

It would be more correct to say that the *Gita* provides a happy synthesis of various ' -isms '— capitalism, socialism and communism. Individual effort and enterprise have an important place in the economic system, even while the fruits of the enterprise have to be shared equitably.

These principles should also govern economic relations among nations. In the past thirty years, much has been accomplished in the sphere of transfer of real resources and technology from the developed to the developing countries, in a variety of ways, bilateral, regional and global. The United Nations and international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, have done much to espouse the cause of the economically backward countries. Yet, it has been admitted on all hands that the flow of assistance to the developing countries is very small, in

relation to both the requirements of the developing countries and the capacity of the developed countries to provide assistance. If the spirit of the *Gita* of selfless work for the general good is followed by the developed countries, even to a modest extent, one should hope for a substantially larger help. If the feeling of *Samatva* permeates into the developed countries, the peoples there will have an intense feeling of brotherhood for those in the less developed countries and to them, consequently, no sacrifice will be too great for bringing about a more equitable distribution of prosperity. Such a sharing will no longer be regarded as a burden, with complaints from tax-payers, Senators and newspapers and journals. The prosperity of every citizen of every country becomes a collective responsibility.

While it should be hoped that the pursuit of the *Gita* spirit will enlarge substantially the flow of help to the less developed countries, the spirit of hard work and self-help should make the developing countries put in much larger effort than they are now doing, to improve their lot. In the *Gita*, there is much stress on one's effort to help one self. There is also much that the rich in the developing countries can do to help their weaker brethren. It is strange but true that there are monstrous inequalities of income, wealth and economic opportunity, in the poor countries. It is the duty of these countries to set their house in order in this regard before they clamour for help from the richer countries. Private effort and fiscal action should be employed actively to secure fairer distribution of income and wealth.

The concept of *Yajna* or sacrifice should also come in handy in economic matters. In the first place, it will put an even greater responsibility on the richer countries

and the more fortunate members of any society to endeavour to return to the community what they have received as God's bounty. Another important consequence of the *Yajna* spirit will be greater concern for maintaining ecological balance in the world, through a marked reduction in environmental pollution and greater conservation of natural resources. The indiscriminate destruction of flora and fauna must stop and every effort should be made to enlarge these resources in a balanced way. Man's excessive greed for enjoyment should be curbed so that there is no unworthy consumption of resources at the expense of future generation.

The spirit of hard work, selflessness and concern for the common good should also bring about substantial industrial peace and happy employer-employee relations. In fact, if the *Gita* spirit is followed, there should be no conflict of interest at all between employers and employees. They should become equal partners in the creation of wealth for enjoyment in an equitable, if not equal, way. The productivity of labour will be very high. There will also be no place at all for claims by workers, whether in a factory or in an office, for rewards out of line with what the community can afford. Likewise, there is an obligation on the part of the management to transfer to the workers the largest possible share of the product of the unit. All this is not *Utopia* but something that is rational and eminently practical. The *Bhagavadgita* can play a distinct role in transforming the national and international economy into one of dynamism, stability and prosperity.

It will also not be a utopia to say that the idea of 'one world' is very much inherent in the *Gita*, not merely in the sense of the planet earth on which we happen

to live but the entire universe. The *Gita*'s message is one of universal brotherhood, not only as between man and man, but also as between man, animals and nature.

With the top priority which the *Gita* gives to the concept of non-violence, one should regard the treatise as being a vigorous champion of the path of peace in international relations. But the *Gita* spirit also calls for action against any country that commits aggression. There should be no compromise with acts of aggression on the part of any country. If all attempts to dissuade the aggressor from giving up his evil path fail, the other countries must not hesitate to resort to force to punish the wrong-doer, even as Arjuna was enjoined by Krishna to fight his relatives, since they were clearly on the path of *Adharma*, that is to say unrighteousness. There is a famous verse in the *Gita* (37, of Chapter 2) which gives the call for strong action against the forces of evil. The Lord tells Arjuna that if he (the latter) dies in the battle he will attain heaven and if he is victorious, he will come to enjoy the kingdom that rightfully belongs to him. Therefore, he (Arjuna) must get up and make up his mind to fight. Krishna comes back to this theme again and again.

Of course, if nations conduct their economic and diplomatic policies in accordance with the principles of *Dharma* outlined in the *Gita*, there should hardly be any occasion for conflict among nations of a sort that should compel resort to force. But, if all other avenues of restraining a wrong-doing nation fail, then force must be employed. But, under no circumstances, should force be employed for securing unfair economic or political advantage to any country, any more than that such advantage should accrue to an individual, since all such

effort will fail in the long run. History amply confirms the working of the theory of *Karma* on the part of individuals as much as on the part of nations.

The *Gita* is also an excellent guide to everyone of us in our day-to-day life. We come across numerous problems and conflicts in our relations with the members of our family, with friends and colleagues in the place where we work. Most of these are problems which raise moral issues and the *Gita* is in a position to give clear answers to our problems and dilemmas.

Everyone of us should observe his *Dharma* without fear or favour. The Cabinet Minister, the legislator, the civil servant, the judge, the policeman and the manager of an office or factory, must all discharge their responsibility, with courage and devotion. The *Gita* prescribes a code of discipline for all, but this discipline is not one that is imposed externally. It is a spontaneous inner urge. Therefore, the discipline and efficiency that the *Gita* advocates are free from strains and tensions. The system is based on a sense of equality, justice and love.

The *Gita* is very instructive in respect of the cultivation of a healthy body and healthy mind. Restraint in food and other essential bodily requirements should contribute much to physical well-being as well as mental peace and harmony. To lead a life of unreasonable and unjust desires, that is to say, greed, lust, jealousy, hatred, disappointment, anger and vindictiveness, suffer physical and mental ailments and to try to remedy them by consuming all kinds of drugs, is indeed to follow a vicious circle. The alternative path of selflessness, love and meditation which the *Gita* has placed before us is one that is highly productive, with minimum investment and maximum return.

The call of the *Gita* for love and compassion is also a call for understanding and forgiveness. Oftentimes, we judge people harshly and unfairly. Even where the action is good, we attribute bad motive to the doer. Clearly, from the point of view of the doer, action and thought must both be good, but others must judge the doer by his action alone.

Of course, oftentimes, our fellowmen do wrong things. We must know that these actions arise from the past *Karma* of the person concerned; to a large extent, he is helpless in this matter. He is carried away by the wave of his past doings. What we should do is not only to overlook his wrong acts and forgive him, but also to help him move on to the path of virtue, righteousness and duty or what is the same, the path of *Dharma*. To criticise a person, run him down and avoid him is to make things worse. This moral should be kept in mind by us in the various spheres of our activity, in the family, office, factory, clubs, associations and circles of friends.

Finally, one should also note the spirit of tolerance which the *Gita* breathes in regard to philosophical and religious matters. There is no dogma about the nature of God or the means of achieving God-realisation. While the *Gita* is essentially a Hindu scripture, it should be a source of delight and instruction to all seekers of truth and wisdom, even as the great books of other religions have much to tell us. The prophets and the seers of great religions have all given a call to humanity to rise above a life of selfishness and egoism to one of altruism, freedom from egoism, service to humanity and surrender to God.

THE BHAGAVADGITA

A Chapter by Chapter Summary

THE *Bhagavadgita* comprises 700 verses, spread over 18 chapters, of varying size, from 20 verses (chapters 12 and 15) to 78 verses (chapter 18). Each chapter carries a title, indicating its subject-matter. Every title is called a '*Yoga*', which in this context means 'a connected exposition of any topic or theme'. Thus, the first chapter is called *Arjuna Visada Yoga*, or the exposition of the despondency of Arjuna. The second chapter is called *Samkhya Yoga*, or the *Yoga* of knowledge, an exposition of the need for right knowledge and understanding and the performance of duty in an unselfish manner.

The word *Yoga* could also mean the technique of God-realisation or union with God. That is why the *Gita* is also referred to in every chapter as *Yoga-Sastra* or the scripture of *Yoga*.

The *Gita* is also referred to as *Upanisad*. It deals with the same subject-matter as that of *Upanisads*, forming part of the *Vedas*. *Upanisad* literally means 'sitting near' the teacher; this description is also appropriate to the *Gita*.

At the end of every chapter, there is a long and identical colophon, except for the name of the chapter. The colophon of the first chapter reads as follows, in Sanskrit:

Ity Srimad Bhagavadgitasupanisatsu Brahma-vidyayam
Yogasastre Sri Krishnarjuna Samvade
ARJUNAVISADAYOGA *nama*
Prathamo'dhyayah.

The English rendering is:

> Thus, in the Upanisad of the Bhagavadgita,
> the science of the Absolute, the scripture of Yoga
> and the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna,
> this is the first chapter entitled
> THE DESPONDENCY OF ARJUNA.

The title of the chapter is given in all capital letters in the Sanskrit version above. The *Gita* is also a dialogue between Krishna and is reported to the blind Dhrtarastra, the father of *Kauravas,* by his charioteer Samjaya, who was bestowed by Vyasa, the author of the treatise, with the power of witnessing the war.

With this introduction, let us now proceed to give a brief chapter by chapter summary of the *Gita.* The titles of the various chapters will be given in Sanskrit as well as English.

A Chapter by Chapter Summary

Chapter 1

ARJUNAVISADA YOGA

(*The Despondency of Arjuna*) (47 *verses*)

The first verse of the *Gita* is a question from Dhrtarastra, to Samjaya. The question is as to what his people, the *Kauravas*, and the *Pandavas*, did on their facing one another, arrayed for war. Samjaya gives a detailed description of the warriors on both sides and their excitment on the eve of the commencement of the armageddon.

The main theme of the chapter, however, is the hesitation, anguish and despondency of Arjuna. Arjuna inspected the rival forces, and along with Krishna blew his divine conch, by way of preparedness for the fight, but subsequently Arjuna experienced a sudden surge of overwhelming grief at the awful prospect of having to kill so many near and dear ones. He spoke to Krishna of evils consequent on the war with the kinsfolk. He was prepared to be slain by the *Kauravas* than slay them. Having spoken thus on the battlefield, Arjuna sank down on the seat of his chariot, casting away his bow and arrows, his mind overborne by sorrow.

Chapter 2

SAMKHYA YOGA

(*The Yoga of Knowledge*) (72 *verses*)

The second chapter is a very important one, containing the ground plan for the grand edifice of the *Gita*. It contains several basic tenets, which are elaborated in later chapters.

Krishna's response to Arjuna's outburst of anguish was one of dismay and disapprobation. He characterised Arjuna's attitude as unmanly and unworthy of an *Arya,* barring the way to heaven and bringing eternal disgrace. This did not seem to have much effect on Arjuna. He continued to maintain his earlier position; yet, he became confused and unsure and said " may be my compunction is weakness. I do not know what my duty is and what the right choice is for me. I am your disciple and suppliant to you; teach me ". But, without waiting for the advice of his teacher, Arjuna declares, " I will not fight "! Then Krishna begins a long discourse, containing several vital matters.

In the first place, Krishna asks Arjuna to note the fundamental difference between body and soul. While the former is mortal, the soul or the self is immaterial, immutable and immortal. However, on account of the effect of *Karma,* or the attachment to sense objects, the soul is held in bondage in the body. The soul becomes free through non-attachment to senses. So, Arjuna should not grieve over the destruction of transient bodies, which are cast off like worn-out garments. This knowledge was of crucial importance.

Non-attachment can be practised when there is efficient and unselfish performance of religious (but not much of ritual) as well as secular work. Everyone has to observe his *Dharma,* the performance of his duty. In this, it is essential not to hanker after, or worry over the fruits of one's action; neither should there be attachment to non-action. By performing one's duty resolutely, and with an even mind in success and failure (*Yoga*), one does not incur sin. On the other hand, the neglect of one's duty constitutes sin.

Consequently, it is of the highest importance to develop steady wisdom through self-conquest. Such wisdom is indeed divine, leading to the soul's salvation. Through disinterested action, one can attain *Yoga,* the intuitive vision of the self.

At this point, Arjuna asks Krishna the description of the man of steady mind (wisdom) — the *Stithaprajna.* Krishna answers rather elaborately. He lives in the world and yet not. Renunciation of all desire and egoism, and satisfaction by the Self in the Self alone is the distinguishing mark of the man of firm wisdom. He is free from the pairs of ' opposites ' and has an undisturbed mind. It is a life of knowledge, understanding, wisdom and unselfishness. This is a divine state of bliss. Thus, in this chapter, there is a brief statement of *Karma-Yoga* and *Jnana-Yoga,* the paths of work and wisdom; *Dhyana-Yoga* or meditation is also mentioned as prelude to *Bhakti-Yoga,* or the path of devotion. There has been an attempt to synthesise theory (*Samkhya*) and practice (*Yoga*).

CHAPTER 3

KARMA YOGA

(*The Path of Work of Action*) (43 *verses*)

Arjuna found it difficult to understand how the lofty concepts set out by Krishna were compatible with the act of slaughter he was called upon to engage in. He sought clarification from Krishna thus. " If you consider that the path of knowledge is superior to the path of action, why do you urge me to do this savage deed "? Krishna sets forth a preliminary reconciliation of the two.

Freedom from action is not obtained by abstaining from action. No man attains perfection merely by renunciation. Action is superior to inaction. In fact, without action of some sort, even sustaining the body will be impossible. Even God has to engage in work. The type of work in which one should engage is determined for him by his endowment and environment; one should follow this rule of *Swadharma*, one's law or duty. Work has to be done without attachment, as a sacrifice (*Yajna*), desiring the welfare of the world and as offering to God. One's work is influenced by one's nature; non-attachment results from this recognition. Krishna concluded thus: " Surrendering all actions to Me, with your thoughts resting on the Supreme Self, freed from hope and egoism, and of mental fever cured, engage in battle. Fearful are the consequences if there is deviation from one's duty, in imitation of another ".

Turning Krishna's advice over in his mind, Arjuna puts the question, " What impels man to commit sin, as

if by force, even against his own will"? Krishna replies, cursorily as yet, that it is craving and anger, the product of the base element of man's nature, that is the constant foe of the wise. So, the senses must be mastered, putting faith in Him. Through knowledge of the Self, Arjuna should smite the enemy in the form of desire, hard to overcome.

Chapter 4

JNANA KARMASAMNYASA YOGA

(*The Yoga of Renunciation of Action in Knowledge/Wisdom*) (42 *verses*)

This chapter deals with the authoritativeness of the doctrine of *Karma-Yoga*, the various types of *Karma*, the character of *Karma-Yoga* as containing in its core an element of *Jnana* and the greater importance of the *Jnana* element.

Krishna, who opens the discourse in this chapter, again stresses the need for wisdom, right-thought and right-reason. In the early part of this chapter, Krishna reveals his God-head and adverts to His own previous incarnations; He incarnates Himself from age to age, whenever there is a decline of *Dharma* and counter-*Dharma* raises its head.

Krishna explains that there is an element of no work in work and *vice-versa*. The path of wisdom lies in ridding all work of desire or motive. Devoid of attachment to fruit, work becomes a necessary corporal reflex, entailing no sin. Work then serves sacrificial ends alone, that is to say, dedication or offering to Brahman.

Krishna tells Arjuna that all types of sacrifice are born of work of some sort. The sacrifice of knowledge or wisdom is better than the sacrifice of material objects; all work, in its entirety, culminates in knowledge/wisdom, which burns all *Karma* into ashes.

The fourth chapter concludes with Krishna's bringing out the mutual relationship of true work, wisdom and self-discipline. Work does not bind him who has renounced it by *Yoga,* who has destroyed all doubt by wisdom and who is, accordingly, in possession of his soul.

Chapter 5

KARMA-SAMNYASA YOGA

(*The Yoga of Renunciation of Action*)
(29 *verses*)

The fifth chapter deals with the quicker efficacy of the path of action *vis-a-vis* the path of knowledge/wisdom. Knowledge itself emerges out of the path of action.

The chapter begins with Arjuna's question: "You praise the renunciation of works and also their unselfish performance. Of the two, which is better, tell me definitely". Krishna replies that while both the paths lead to liberation, the unselfish performance of works is better, for all but the exceptional individuals. The path of attachment-less action can be regarded as the earlier stage in the spiritual process. It lays the solid foundation for a life of renunciation.

Krishna goes on to describe the characteristics of a person who acts without attachment. He regards men

and animals without discrimination; that is to say, he is imbued with the feeling of *Samatva.* He regards his own soul as forming actually the soul of all beings. He is not elevated by getting what is pleasant nor does he sorrow over what is unpleasant. Further, he is free from I-ness and mine-ness and resigns all his action to God; consequently, this is not touched by sin, even as a lotus leaf is untouched by water. Work becomes worship.

Ever liberated is he who shuts off external contacts, regulates his breath, controls the senses, the mind and the intellect, has eliminated desire, fear and wrath, and realising Him as the recipient of all sacrifice and austerities, the Lord of all the worlds and the friend of all beings, concludes Krishna.

Chapter 6

ATMA SAMYAMA YOGA OR DHYANA YOGA

(*The Yoga of Meditation*) (47 *verses*)

The object of this chapter is to give the rationale and technique of the path of *Yoga,* for the achievement of an inward intuitive vision of the individual self. The superiority of the *Yoga* of divine devotion to all other forms or aspects of *Yoga* is also stated.

Krishna continues his description of the *Yogin.* Meditation is the climax of renunciation. Unselfish work is the means of reaching *Yoga,* but the means of maintaining the position is serenity.

The sense organs should be brought under control and then things follow smoothly in the spiritual path. The *Yogin* has no attachments and aversions, neither friend nor foe. Then follow detailed instructions about

the place for meditation and equipment, which may not be applicable in the modern life. But the direction in regard to Yogic modes are relevant.

The pre-requisite to *Yoga* is the three-fold condition of equanimity, indifference and equality. The mind requires to be concentrated on a single focal point, the senses curbed, the body, head and neck held erect and still, looking fixed at the tip of the nose, without looking around; the *Yogin* should turn his mind to Him, intent on Him alone. The *Yogin* is thus completely freed from ego and desires, and attains union with the Self. Continuing, Krishna says that he who sees Him everywhere and everything in Him, in him He is always imminent and he is never lost to Him.

Arjuna expresses the practical difficulty of following, in an enduring manner, the path of equanimity of mind, which he says is very unsteady, impetuous, strong, obstinate and difficult to control, as the wind. Krishna appreciates the difficulty, but he asserts that the mind can be controlled by constant practice and non-attachment.

Arjuna raises another question. What way does that person go, who has faith but whose mind wanders away from *Yoga?* Does he not perish like a rent cloud? Krishna's reply is reassuring. Such a person, with a record of good, will never tread the path of woe. He gains a place in the world reserved for the good and he is reborn in the house of the pure and prosperous or in the family of *Yogins.* He will strive again for perfection and attain the supreme goal through many births.

The chapter concludes with Krishna's declaration " And of all *Yogins,* he who, being possessed of faith, is devoted to Me, with his inner self directed towards Me, he is deemed by Me to be the best among the *Yogins* ".

CHAPTER 7

JNANA-VIJNANA YOGA

(*The Yoga of Knowledge and Wisdom*)

(30 *verses*)

This chapter is the first of a series of chapters which deal with the nature of God and the nature of *Bhakti* (devotion). It develops the theme of losing oneself in God. The chapter deals with the nature of the Supreme Being, the concealment and obscuration of the Supreme, from the point of view of finite consciousness, by the principle of *Maya* (illusion), impelled by the pairs of opposites, the remedy against *Maya* as comprising surrender to the Supreme, the several kinds of devotees (the man in affliction, the seeker of worldly goods, the seeker of self-knowledge and the man of wisdom) and the valuation of the devotee who is a man of wisdom as the highest type of devotee. This wisdom enables one to perform one's duty unflinchingly. The seventh chapter concludes with the following words of Krishna: " Those, who, having resorted to Me as their support and guide, endeavour for the liberation from old age and death, they know the Eternal, they know the whole of what constitutes the intrinsic essence of the soul (or the Self) and all about Action (*Karma*). Those who know Me as the One that governs the material and the divine aspects, and all sacrifices, they, with their minds harmonised, have knowledge of Me, even at the time of their departure from life ".

Chapter 8

AKSHARA BRAHMA YOGA

(*The Yoga of the Imperishable Absolute*)

(28 *verses*)

The whole of the eighth chapter is a continuation and elaboration of the concluding words of the seventh chapter. Arjuna seeks elucidation of the import of some technical terms and wishes to be told explicitly of the manner and matter of the final contemplation of the dying aspirant.

Arjuna's questions are:

" What is Brahman (or the Absolute)? What is the intrinsic essence of the Self or soul (*Adhyatma*)? What is *Karma*? What is the essence of (material) beings (*Adhibhuta*)? What is that which is said to be the essence of deities (*Adhidaivam*)? What is the essence of worship in this embodiment and how? How may You be realised by persons of well-controlled nature, at the time of their departure from life? " The rest of the chapter is Krishna's reply, even if incomplete, to these questions.

Brahman is Imperishable, the Supreme. Its presence in each individual body is called *Adhyatma*. *Karma* is the creative force that brings beings into existence. *Adibhuta* pertains to the destructible entity (that is to say, mutation) of all created things, in contrast to the imperishable (*Akshara*) nature of the Supreme. The basis of all divine elements, the Indweller, is the cosmic spirit (*Adidaivatam*). Krishna says further, " I am Myself in this very embodiment the intrinsic essence of all acts of worship or sacrifice (*Adiyajna*)".

Put simply, the Supreme Spirit pervades all sacrifices, all deities and all work. All these are the varied expressions of the Supreme. Krishna gives an integral knowledge of the Divine in all its aspects, imperishable and mutable. There is the immutable *Brahman,* the personal God *Iswara,* the individual soul which partakes of the higher nature of the Divine and *Prakriti,* the mutable nature.

Krishna then goes to answer the question as to how that imperishable Supreme, God, may be realised by persons of well-controlled nature, at the time of their departure from life. He who thinks of God alone, at the time of his death, attains absorption in God. Since one does not know when death is at the door, one should meditate on God always! In other words, God-realisation calls for steady effort throughout one's life, with the body restrained and the mind controlled. God-realisation is union with God; there is no return to birth. What is essential is unswerving devotion to Him and Him alone.

CHAPTER 9

RAJAVIDYA-RAJAGUHYA YOGA

(*The Yoga of Sovereign Knowledge and Sovereign Mystery*) (34 *verses*)

The ninth chapter is regarded as being very important, in the task of understanding God and realising Him. This chapter treats, of the peculiar and supreme greatness of God, of the undiminished divinity in His incarnation as man, and of the special value of the loving devotion to God, *Bhakti,* as a means of God-attain-

ment. The chapter attempts to reconcile the transcendency of God with His immanence in the Universe. Everything proceeds from Him and He is ultimately responsible for all the changes in the Universe. This dual aspect of God calls for both worship and work, on the part of man.

The chapter begins with a statement by Krishna Himself, that is to say, without any question from Arjuna, that He will reveal to Arjuna the profound secret of metaphysical wisdom with physical science contained, which would free one from evil. Krishna also says that this royal learning and royal secret, which is realisable by direct experience, is very easy to practise ! It is only those that lack faith in this *Dharma,* the law, that fail to attain God and return to the path of mortal living (*Samsara*).

God pervades the whole world in His unmanifested form and yet He does not abide in the beings. Beings abide in God and yet they do not abide in Him, as the mighty air moving everywhere ever. Under His guidance, nature sends forth the moving and unmoving. God is father and mother of the world. God is the goal, the upholder, the Lord, the witness, the refuge and the friend. He is the seat of origin and dissolution of the world.

God may be worshipped in any manner. Even those who are devotees of 'other' Gods and worship them with faith, in reality worship Him only, though not according to the 'true' law. God is the same to all beings. None is hateful or dear to Him. Those who worship Him with devotion are in Him and He is also in them.

The chapter concludes with Krishna's advice to Arjuna, "On Me, fix your mind; be devoted to Me;

worship Me; revere Me; thus having disciplined yourself, with Me as your supreme goal, you will come unto Me ".

CHAPTER 10

VIBHUTI YOGA

(*The Yoga of Divine Glories*)

(42 *verses*)

The tenth chapter is an exposition of the exalted attributes of God and the boundless realm of finite entities that constitute His glories, as a step in the path of *Bhakti* (loving devotion to God). The chapter is intended to help us to know that God pervades and penetrates. Arjuna, who was convinced of the glory and power of God, wanted to hear from Krishna, in greater detail, the nectar of His power and glory.

Krishna states that He is the Self seated in the heart of all beings, and that He is the beginning, the middle and also the end of all beings. All the mental states of beings — intelligence, internal peace, happiness, misery, fear, fearlessness, etc., etc., all proceed from Him alone. Everything which lives or moves, or merely exists, does so through Him only.

Yet, the power and glories of God that are revealed to us are only illustrative of His infinite glory. What is manifested is only a part of His splendour, a fragment of Himself. God is not confined to this material universe; He is also above and beyond it.

Chapter 11

VISHVARUPA DARSANA YOGA

(*The Yoga of the Vision of Cosmic or Universal Form*) (55 *verses*)

Arjuna says that following Krishna's discourse on the supreme secret concerning the self, his delusion is gone. He has *heard*, in detail, Krishna's imperishable greatness. Arjuna now expresses a desire to *see* Krishna's divine form, if He thinks it can be seen by him! The Lord was pleased to accede to Arjuna's request and for this purpose, bestows on him divine eye to behold the Lord's hundredfold, thousandfold...forms, in various colours and shape, in fact the whole universe, moving and unmoving.

> That form had many faces, many eyes, exhibited manifold wonders, was adorned by many divine ornaments, holding in readiness many divine weapons, wearing divine garlands, with divine perfumes smeared all over, having its faces turned towards all the universe, and was luminous, infinite and an abode of all wonders. The illumination radiated by the form could be approached probably by the light that would be generated in the world if a thousand suns were to rise simultaneously. Arjuna beheld then the entire universe divided manifold occupying a part of that body of the God of gods.

What Arjuna beheld was grand, bewildering and frightening. Arjuna also saw the spectacle of his cousins (the sons of Dhrtarastra), elders like Bhisma and Drona and the chief warriors on both sides entering the Lord's mouths, fierce with fangs.

Apparently, it was Krishna's wish to emphasise in this vision His aspect as the Great Destroyer, so as to make Arjuna participate effectively in the war against his evil cousins. Arjuna was startled by what he saw; he must have expected to realise other aspects of God. So, he asks Krishna " Tell me who You are, possessed of this fierce form? Have mercy on me. I wish to know You, the Primal One. I do not understand Your manifestation ". Krishna replies that he is Time, world-destroying, grown mature, engaged in destroying the worlds; evidently, destruction is part of the Divine Plan. ' Your foes have already been slain by me; you be only an instrument for their destruction '. This statement was also meant, apparently, to remove any egoistic feeling which Arjuna may have had.

Thereupon, Arjuna burst into a praise of the Lord and asked His forgiveness for regarding Krishna only as his friend. Further, not being able to endure the unique vision, Arjuna begged Krishna to resume his original four-armed form, with the mace, discus, etc. Asking Arjuna not to be afraid and bewildered, Krishna resumed his earlier form of grace. Arjuna said that he had collected his mind and was restored to his normal state.

The chapter closes with Krishna's remark that the cosmic form which Arjuna saw earlier cannot be secured through study of the *Vedas,* penance, gifts or sacrifice, but only by unswerving devotion to Him alone. " He who does My work and seeks Me as the Supreme end, is My devotee. Freed from all selfish attachments and devoid of hatred towards all beings, he comes to Me ", thus Krishna concluded.

Chapter 12

BHAKTI YOGA

(*The Yoga of Devotion*) (20 *verses*)

The twelfth chapter teaches the superiority of the path of devotion and the means for its adoption.

The chapter begins with a question by Arjuna. He had been told about the Imperishable Absolute (*Brahman*), formless, nameless, etc. But he had also experienced the vision of Krishna's Cosmic Form and he had been asked by Krishna to look to Him as the goal and work for Him with devotion, etc. In this was implicit a choice of two paths and so Arjuna enquires of Krishna as to who is the better devotee, he who worships Krishna or he who worships the Unmanifested and Indestructible. That is to say, the question concerns the relative merits of form-worship and form-less worship. The rest of the chapter is taken up by Krishna's answer.

Krishna says that both the paths are all right for God-realisation, but the task is more difficult for those who worship the Unmanifested. Consequently, Krishna talks more on the worship of God in His form; what is primarily required is simple-minded adoration of Him, all actions should be dedicated to Him and the discriminatory intelligence should be directed at Him. This may call for constant practice. If this is not possible, the devotee is enjoined to perform work for His sake. If even this is not possible, one should give up the fruits of all action; this is the path of works, but eventually this should lead to the path of devotion. In other words, while the path of devotion is the best, either the path of

wisdom or the path of action is all right, the former as the intermediate step and the latter as the first step.

Krishna then enumerates the qualities of a devotee dear to Him — absence of ill-will to any being, friendly, merciful, free from fear, egoism and mine-ness, alike in pain and pleasure, contented, self-controlled, his mind and reason dedicated to Him, skilled in the performance of his duty, relinquishing all selfish endeavour, and so on. The chapter concludes with Krishna's declaration " And those devotees who, full of faith and regarding Me as their highest goal, adopt the life-giving or immortal wisdom as taught above, are exceedingly dear to Me ".

CHAPTER 13

KSHETRA-KSHETRAJNA VIBHAGA YOGA

(*The Yoga of Distinction between the Field and the Knower of the Field*) (34 *verses*)

This is the beginning of a series of six chapters which clarify and integrate the ideas set forth in the earlier twelve chapters on the nature of the body, soul, the Supreme Being and the three paths of *Karma, Jnana* and *Bhakti,* for God-realisation.

The 13th chapter comprises the following topics:

(1) The nature of the body and the Soul.

(2) The method of realising the nature of the self as transcending the body.

(3) The cause that brings about the association of the Self with matter.

(4) The manner of contemplating the mutual distinctness of the self and matter.

The body is the field, or *Kshetra,* the knower is *Kshetrajna* (the knower) and God is *Super-Kshetrajna,* or Knower of the field in all fields. The awareness of this constitutes *Jnana* or true knowledge. The 'field' is constituted by the elements, senses, the mind, the objects of the senses. Krishna mentions a long list of qualities that constitute knowledge — humility, non-violence, indifference to sense objects, non-attachment, unswerving devotion to God, quiet meditation, etc.

The 'eternal' goal is the Supreme Brahman, who is beginningless, neither being nor non-being and pervades everywhere, is far away and yet near, unattached and yet supporting all. He is 'Knowledge', the object and means of Knowledge.

All things, animate and inanimate, are born from union between matter and soul. Matter and soul are beginningless; all qualities and transformations arise from matter only; the soul, embodied, experiences all these. Attachment to qualities is the cause of the birth of the soul. In the body also dwells the Supreme Person, supervising, supporting and permitting. The 'Self' is perceived by some in themselves, through meditative self-effort, by speculative reasoning by some and through practice of unselfish action, by others. He who sees the Spureme Lord, abiding equally in all beings, and who sees that the manifold state of beings is rooted in the One and from that One alone, he sees the Truth and attains the Eternal.

CHAPTER 14

GUNA TRAYA VIBHAGA YOGA

(*The Yoga of the Differentiation of the Three Modes*)
(27 *verses*)

In the previous chapter, reference was made to the fact that the bondage of the soul is caused by the working of *gunas* or qualities in respect of matter or the body. It is but natural for Krishna to proceed to tell Arjuna something more about the qualities and modifications concerning matter. This is the substance of the fourteenth chapter. This may be regarded as a continuation of Krishna's exposition in the thirteenth chapter.

The primary constituents of matters are *Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas,* and these bind the embodied soul. *Sattva* (purity, stainless, goodness, cognisability, harmony), which is free from evil, binds the soul by attachment to happiness and attachment to knowledge. *Rajas* (passion, mobility, energy) springs from craving and attachment and binds the soul by attachment to action. *Tamas* (dullness, ignorance, inertia, stupor), veiling wisdom, attaches to negligence and proclivity to error. The three modes are present in all beings, in different degrees, but one of them predominates. He who seeks salvation has to look beyond the three modes; he should become *Trigunatita,* that is even beyond *Sattva,* since that mode too carries an attachment!

At this stage, Arjuna puts the pertinent question, " What are the marks of the person who has risen above the modes, and how does he get beyond the three qualities ". Sri Krishna gave a brief but comprehensive reply.

He should not abhor the qualities nor long for them. He should remain unperturbed by them. He should be balanced in pleasure and pain, fame and blame, self-reliant, look upon a clod, a stone and a piece of gold alike, treat friend and foe alike and abandon all undertakings and eschew all initiative.

Krishna concludes by saying that he who serves Him with unfailing devotion rises above the qualities and is fit for attaining the Supreme, the abode of immortality and immutability, the eternal law (*Dharma*) and absolute bliss. Something on these lines was earlier mentioned by the Lord, in chapter seven.

Chapter 15

PURUSHOTTAMA YOGA

(*The Yoga of attaining the Supreme Person*)

(20 *verses*)

This chapter seeks to bring together the teachings in some earlier chapters, on the nature and glory of the Supreme Person, *Purushottama*, and clarifies matters in a masterly way. Although the beginning of the chapter appears to be abrupt, with a reference to the *Asvattha* (Pipal) tree, with roots above and branches below, this chapter is an elaboration of the last verse of chapter fourteen. The chapter is also a summary of the great conclusions of the *Vedanta*.

The Supreme Person is *Purushottama*, the Lord of *Purusha* (the individual soul) and *Prakriti* (matter). He is the foundation of the Universe of matter and mind; He defines their attributes and determines the relations

that subsist among them. Thus, he is also the foundation and support of the everlasting law of righteousness and of the endless bliss of the emancipated.

It is not possible to comprehend the form of the Supreme Person, neither its end nor its origin. Having cut the tree of *Samsara* (cycle of births and deaths), with the strong axe of non-attachment, then that Goal is to be sought for, from where those who go never return. One should seek refuge in that Primal Person or that unique One, who is 'centred in the hearts of all, from whom memory and perception and their loss also come, who is verily that which has to be known by all the *Vedas,* who indeed is the author of the *Vedanta* and who is the Knower of the Veda'. He who is free from delusion, thus knows *Purushottama,* the Highest Person, and having nothing more to learn, worships Him, with his entire being.

Chapter 16

DAIVASURA SAMPAD VIBHAGA YOGA

(*The Yoga of the Distinction between the Divine and Demoniacal Endowments*) (24 *verses*)

Following a discussion of metaphysics relating to body, soul and the Supreme Being and their inter-relationships, the sixteenth chapter and the next two, discuss the practical aspects of these.

Krishna, continuing his discourse, describes to Arjuna the qualities of persons with divine and demoniac nature, respectively. These natures are the result of the ethical and spiritual performances of persons in their past lives. The divine mode has been described in various contexts

in earlier chapters — fearlessness, purity of mind, control over senses, performance of sacrifice, truth, non-violence, absence of anger, etc., etc. The demoniac qualities are the opposite to the above. The demoniac way is harmful intellectually as well as in a practical respect. It denies the existence of the Self and the Supreme Self and it also pursues material pleasures feverishly. Consequently, there is no escape from the bondage of *Samsara.* Demoniac people pursue the triple pathway to hell, namely, lust, anger and greed; he who eschews this triad does what is good for his soul and reaches Supreme goal.

In the last two verses of the chapter, Krishna mentions the importance of strict adherence to the precepts of the *Sastra,* the scripture (the body of sacred injunctions), which should be the ' authority for determining what should be done and what should not be done '. In terms of this authority, and *not* the promptings of desire, everyone ought to work in this world.

According to many commentators, the whole chapter is a background to the affirmation of the authority of the *Sastra.* In a world which is likely to be led by impulses of all sorts and which comprises persons of ' demoniac ' nature too, the guidance of the *Sastra* is of great help towards right conduct, as the *Sastra* maps out the pathway to God and embodies His words of guidance to mankind. The *Sastra* is beneficial to all, in respect of both social happiness and salvation. Man needs the moral and spiritual discipline of the *Sastra* (of course, the *Gita* itself is a great *Sastra*).

CHAPTER 17

SHRADDHA TRAYA VIBHAGA YOGA

(*The Yoga of the Three fold Division of Faith*)
(28 *verses*)

The mandate of the *Sastra,* referred to by Krishna in the concluding part of the sixteenth chapter, led Arjuna to ask the question "If one who sets aside the ordinances of the scriptures, but offers sacrifices, that is to say worships, filled with faith, what is his state — *Sattva, Rajas* or *Tamas?*"

Krishna does not offer a straight answer. Earnest faith is all important, but the quality of the faith depends upon the sway of the *Gunas.* The three *gunas* are also applicable to food, sacrifice, penance, gifts. Food can be classified into *Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas.* Thus, hot and spicy food belongs to the *Rajas* category. Again, the sacrifice or worship that is offered according to the scriptures, in a spirit of duty and without desire for fruit is *Sattvic.* If it is offered for the sake of fruit and self-glorification, it belongs to the *Rajas* type.

This categorisation is somewhat on the lines of the sixteenth chapter, wherein the divine and demoniac modes of life were portrayed, the former being declared by the Lord to be in conformity with the *Vedic* scripture. The chapter concludes by introducing a formula that is said to go with everything *Vedic* and that is ritualistic, symbolic and mystic. This formula, comprising three words, is 'OM (AUM) TAT SAT' or the three-fold designation of Brahman or the Supreme Being. These words have not been defined in the *Gita* and so commentators draw much from the *Upanisads* to interpret

the expression. One view is that the expression means "Yes (OM), that (TAT) exists (SAT), meaning that the Supreme Reality or Being is there, all pervasive. Another view is that OM stands for Transcendental Absolute, TAT for Universal Truth and SAT for the Reality. So Om Tat Sat represents *Brahman* in its various aspects. SAT also stands for goodness.

Krishna further states that all acts of worship, charity and penance, enjoined by the Scriptures, are begun by those who study the *Brahman,* with the utterance of the syllable OM, which being the phonetic blend of A, U and M, is said to represent the harmonious togetherness of man, universe and God. It is beyond the scope of this summary to deal with the many interpretations of OM, which is probably the most sacred syllable in *Vedanta.* TAT is uttered by seekers of salvation, while performing the various acts of worship, austerity and charity, without desire for fruit.

SAT is used in the sense of existence (reality) and goodness. It also stands for an asupicious act or a righteous deed. Further, steadfastness in worship, penance and charity is spoken of as SAT, as also action for the sake of the Lord. Finally, says Krishna, whatever oblation is offered, or gift made or penance is practised, whatever action is performed, without faith, it becomes 'Asat', or the opposite of SAT; it is of no use here or hereafter.

What this means is that we must always think of God, *before* engaging in any work or worship as well as *during* work or worship. Further, faith is of the utmost importance in all acts of work, worship and fulfilment of obligations towards other beings in the creation, whether these are done in accordance with the rules of the *Sastra* or

in accordance with the inner prompting, with sincerity and without self-conceit.

It may be concluded that Krishna's answer to Arjuna's question is that *Sastra* and *Sraddah* (faith) are equally important, whether in the quest for liberation or in engaging in acts of goodness.

What is important is not the letter of the *Sastra* but the spirit of it. One might not know formally the injunctions of the *Sastra,* but he may be pursuing a path which he thinks is right and just.

On the whole, the seventeenth chapter appears to be something of a digression from the main theme.

Chapter 18

MOKSHASAMNYASA YOGA

(*The Yoga of Liberation by Renunciation*)

(78 *verses*)

This is the concluding chapter and the longest one. It contains a resume of the wide range of themes covered in the earlier chapters and takes the argument to the culminating stage of removing fully Arjuna's doubts, delusion and despondency. Partly for this reason and partly on account of the fact that in the fourth and fifth chapters of this book an exhaustive account has been given of the principal topics covered in the eighteenth chapter, the summary here can be brief.

The chapter begins with a question by Arjuna, seeking the true nature of *Samnyasa* and *Tyaga,* or renunciation and relinquishment, respectively. Krishna says that *Samnyasa* is giving up of works prompted by desire and

Tyaga is the abandonment of the fruits of all work. Through a rather long string of familiar arguments, it is brought out that *Tyaga* is the means to the goal of *Samnyasa*. Thus, what is required for securing ultimate happiness is a "combination of renunciation of fruit of action, with performance of duty, as assigned by a social organisation based on differences of human temperament and in accordance with the predominance of one or other of the three *gunas*". The agency of one's action should be attributed to God and one's duties should be transferred into worship.

There is a detailed, and familiar to readers by now, account of the way of life of persons dominated by *Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas,* respectively; naturally, the *Sattvic* way of life is advocated.

He whose mind is totally unattached, who has subdued himself and from whom desire has fled, obtains, through renunciation *naiskarmya*. the supreme perfection of freedom from obligation, that is to say, from the impressed tendencies of *Karma*. He then attains *Brahman*, which is the supreme consummation of knowledge/wisdom. Through devotion he comes to know Him, what His measure is and who He is in truth; then having known Him, he forthwith enters into Him.

After this teaching in general, Krishna comes back to the specific matter of Arjuna's duty then. Says the Lord, "Fixing your thought on Me, you shall, by My grace, cross over all difficulties. But if, from self-conceit, you will not listen to Me, you will perish. If you think 'I will not fight', vain will be your resolve".

The final words of advice to Arjuna, from the Lord are: "Seek refuge in Him alone, with all your heart; through His grace you will obtain supreme peace and the

eternal abode. Completely renouncing all *dharmas* (duties ...), seek Me alone as refuge. I will release you from all sins. Do not grieve ".

Thus, in this final chapter, the paths of action, wisdom and devotion have been portrayed beautifully. One could regard them as the three successive stages of spiritual evolution or as three aspects of a single path. No wonder that Arjuna tells the Lord " Gone is my delusion. Memory has come back to me, O Krishna, through Your grace. I stand free from doubt. I will act according to Your word ".

Samjaya, who had breathlessly heard the Krishna-Arjuna dialogue and been thrilled with joy again and again, declared to King Dhrtarastra that " Wherever there is Krishna, the Lord of *Yoga,* and wherever is Partha (Arjuna), wielding his bow, there, it is my conviction, will be fortune, victory, prosperity and enduring righteousness ". It will be noted that Arjuna, who had cast away his bow and arrows, is now holding his bow, ready for the battle against the *Kauravas.*

How fortunate was Samjaya, probably even more fortunate than Arjuna, to listen to the immortal dialogue. One must also admire his forthrightness when he tells his master that victory is with Arjuna!

Here the *Bhagavadgita* ends

Homage to the Blessed Krishna

May there be happiness everywhere
and peace to all beings

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